

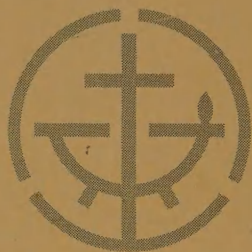
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THE PEOPLE'S BIBLE:

DISCOURSES UPON HOLY SCRIPTURE.

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BY

JOSEPH PARKER, D.D.,

Minister of the City Temple, Holborn Viaduct, London.

AUTHOR OF "ECCE DEUS," "THE PARACLETE," "THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST,"
"SPRINGDALE ABBEY," "THE INNER LIFE OF CHRIST," "AD CLERUM,"
"THE ARK OF GOD," "APOSTOLIC LIFE," "TYNE CHYLDE,"
"WEAVER STEPHEN," "EVERY MORNING," "THE
PEOPLE'S FAMILY PRAYER BOOK,"
ETC., ETC.

VOL. XVII.

HOSEA—MALACHI.

London:

HAZELL, WATSON, AND VINEY, LD.,
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PREFACE.

IN concluding my pastoral notes upon the Old Testament I feel that the necessities of space have seriously curtailed the outline which I had hoped to fill up. The same remark will apply to the eight volumes devoted to the New Testament. From the outset the number of volumes was fixed at twenty-five, and I cannot but think that the number ought not to be enlarged. I look back upon my labours with religious thankfulness.

Sometimes I am inclined to think that I have had but little to do with THE PEOPLE'S BIBLE. I have been but an instrument in the hands of God. I can own nothing but the imperfections of the service. I believe the work can claim a large degree of uniqueness in the printed history of the Christian pulpit. That one man should comment upon the whole Bible is a novelty in these latter days, when all kinds of labour have been classified and distributed by an analysis which has been jealous lest any worker should encroach upon the task of another.

Yet such boldness as mine is not without specific

vindication, inasmuch as it is, in my judgment, better to preach steadily through the Bible than to treat its sacred contents irregularly and capriciously. Preachers do, it is presumed, cover most of the Bible in the course of a lifelong ministry. I only differ from many of my brethren, therefore, in what may be called the method of working ; that is to say, whilst they have traversed the Biblical field from every conceivable point of approach, now in Genesis, now in Titus, now in Nehemiah, now in Revelation ; to-day amongst the prophets, and to-morrow amongst the apostles, I have pursued an undeviating line from the beginning to the end.

My experience, as represented in these volumes, is that congregations are not averse to systematic and expository preaching. Objectors there will of course always be. It is, however, quite in consonance with my experience to affirm that the people who constitute the real strength of any church regard with appreciation all efforts at consecutive teaching. Here I would fain be the counsellor of those who are my juniors in the ministry, and of those who shall arise in years yet distant, asking permission to exhort them not to be irregular textists, but to be Biblical expositors.

And here I remind myself, with great satisfaction, that Biblical exposition is no longer an affair of technical grammar alone, but of that larger treatment of expression and purpose which shows that the Bible speaks all languages, and includes the whole range of human experience.

Greek has been critically translated into English ; now let English be sympathetically translated into the whole spirit and action of daily life. Do not let us cower under the taunt that we have read meanings into words ; rather let us rejoice that inspired words contain infinitely more meaning than their human writers ever dreamed. God has at once enshrined and concealed himself in words. He has tarried for us in unsuspected places. The shrub which we treated as an anonymous wayside plant has suddenly become the tabernacle of the Most High.

Let us always look for the larger meanings. In the Biblical mine particles may be diamonds. In the Book divine even prepositions and adverbs may contain some secret of God. I am confident that mere literalists, who confine themselves to pedantic parsing, and who lock up the prophets within centuries as within cells, can never represent the whole idea of divine inspiration. What is done within these volumes is a most imperfect attempt to show that the horizon of my ideal has enlarged and receded as I have vainly endeavoured to realise and appropriate its infinite glory.

JOSEPH PARKER.

THE CITY TEMPLE,
August, 1892.

NOTE.

As has been stated from the beginning, the annotated text represents many minds and much learning. Before a line of the work was published this was part of the scheme which I set myself to work out, as will be seen on reference to the original and succeeding prospectuses. Again and again this has also been acknowledged in the volumes which have been issued.

I now thank publishers and authors who have at my request generously sent me their works to be used for the purpose of such annotations ; and I especially record my obligations for such works as "The Speaker's Commentary," Ellicott's "Old and New Testament," "The Bible Educator," and Clarke's "Foreign Theological Library." I must also warmly recognise such works as those of Drs. Cheyne, Driver, Ginsburg, George Adam Smith, Robertson Smith, Samuel Green, and Archibald Duff. As the work is emphatically designed for the *People*, in accordance with its distinctive title, the rule in selecting the annotations has been to secure the utmost clearness and simplicity. This department of the work has been almost wholly executed by competent assistants, to whom I tender most cordial thanks.

J. P.

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HOSEA.

PRAYER.

FATHER in heaven, take not thy Holy Spirit from us. Take what thou wilt, but take not thy Holy Spirit from the human soul. We live and move and have our being in God; thou wilt not willingly cut us off. As thou livest, thou hast no pleasure in death; there is no death in God, there is no graveyard in heaven. God is life, God is light; in him is no death, in him is no darkness at all. We would therefore receive God into our hearts, and say, Abide with us, for without thee we cannot live. We know thee through Jesus Christ thy Son; he revealed the Father; from the bosom of the Father he came; he proceeded forth and came from God. We heard the eternity of God in his voice. It was no voice of man; it was no voice of earth; never man spake like this Man. He made even our words divine by using them. Now we call thee Father; thou art in heaven, and we are upon the earth, yet there is no distance between us; thy heaven holds our little earth. Thou carriest all things, thou Creator of all. Watch over our life, we pray thee, in the name of thy dear Son, and make it precious in thy sight; make us good men, sound of heart, bright of mind, obedient of will. Teach us that obedience is greatness; show us that only true suffering truly borne is heroic; teach us that not to have our own way is the best way. Thus by loss, or pain, or trial, or sevenfold night, bring us into obedience. We pray for those who are sorely afflicted. How great is the darkness of God; how terrible are thy judgments when they come near to us! We pray for those whose house is desolated, whose firstborn lie dead. Thou knowest all the pain, the heartache, the blinding tear, the overwhelming sorrow, the sense of loss unutterable; now let them find the balm that is in Gilead, and fall upon the Physician that is there with all the trust of their love. Thou dost trouble this little world with great sorrows; sometimes the grief seems larger than the life itself, sometimes it is an overflowing water. The grace of God is sufficient for us all, but we cannot always seize it and apply it as we might do. Thou knowest our frame, thou rememberest that we are dust; thou wilt not plead against us with thy great power. But having shown us great and sore distresses, thou wilt comfort us again with unexpected solaces. Guide us during the few remaining days; for our days are but a handful at the best; give us the spirit of consideration; give us the sound large judgment that weighs things in the right scales; save us from making fools of ourselves by wasting what little daylight there is. Keep us

steadfast in the faith of the Cross of Christ. We need that Cross when our grief is keen, when our eyes are blind with tears, and when our choicest friend says he can do no more for us: then, Jesus, Refuge of my soul, may I find thee indeed an eternal Sanctuary! Hear the poor soul that says this, and give it answers from the Cross and replies from heaven. Amen.

HOSEA REVISED.

SOME persons were afraid that the Revision Companies would take the Bible away. A Bible that can be taken away is not worth keeping. A God that can be stolen is a poor Lord to have dominion over any human soul. Take the Book of Hosea after the Revisers have had it under careful revision. Many passages are altered verbally; yet the alteration has only been like making an opening for a larger window. A house is none the worse for having more light in it. What we should ask for about every book is the truth. We do not want words we have been accustomed to if they are not true. We may be sorry to surrender them; they have come to be part of our very breathing; yet if they are not true they must go. Always draw a vital line between superstition and religion; between prejudice and true judgment. The conservatism that would keep an error is a blasphemy against the spirit of truth and progress. In the Book of Hosea we may see some striking instances of change in the word without seeing any real change in the inner and divine thought. Let us proceed to illustrate this:—

“And it shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith the Lord, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth; and the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel” (ii. 21, 22).

What does that mean? It means nothing as it stands. He is doing a useless work who tries to force it into meaning. Better confess that we are bewildered by these bold personifications. The image is graphic; but who can interpret the speech? The Revisers change the word “hear” into the word “answer”; then the *prosopopœia* runs thus: And it shall come to pass in that day, that the heavens will ask me to give their rain to the earth, and I will answer the heavens; and the earth will ask the heavens to give it rain, and the heavens will answer the earth; and the things that are in the earth will ask the earth to grow them to give them power such as it may possess of reproductiveness; and the earth shall hear every praying root that is hid in

its heart, and thus there shall be a great process or ministry of request and reply, prayer and answer. Has the passage been destroyed by the revision? The passage has simply been illuminated.

“For Israel slideth back as a backsliding heifer” (iv. 16).

What is a backsliding heifer? We do not know; there is no such creature. But read: “Israel acts stubbornly like a heifer,” and the meaning is clear. The heifer will not go as its owner wants it to go. The heifer stands back when it ought to go forward; turns aside when it ought to move straight on; wriggles and twists and, as it were, protests; and only by greater strength, or by the infliction of suffering, can the heifer be made to go to its destined place. The prophet, looking upon that heifer, now on the right, now on the left, now stooping, now throwing up its head in defiance, says, Such is Israel, such is Ephraim. We lose nothing by the change; we gain very much.

“Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth” (vi. 3).

What does that mean? Nobody knows; that is to say, no one who confines attention simply to the English tongue. How has the Revision put it? Thus: “Let us know, let us follow on to know the Lord; his going forth is sure as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter rain that watereth the earth.” How much simpler, how perfectly obvious the meaning! “Let us follow on to know the Lord.” Will he come? Yes, as sure as the morning. After what manner will he bless us if we follow on? Why, he will bless you as the rain blesses the earth; yea, as the former and the latter rain come down to quench the thirst of the arid soil. Thus all difficulty is taken away, and the beauteous truth stands out in fullest figure.

The sixth chapter is remarkable for changes.

“Your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away” (vi. 4).

What is the “early dew”? Is there a late dew? No. Then why speak of an early dew? The prophet did not speak of it. All dew is early. How then should we read it?—“like

the dew that goeth early away." It is not the dew itself that is early, but the dew that goeth early up into the sun, for the formation of clouds and the elaboration of rainbows. Is anything lost by this change? Much is gained.

A very striking change is made in the seventh verse of the same chapter:—"But they like men have transgressed the covenant." In the Revision a name occurs to which the Bible seems to have paid very small attention; instead of "like men" we read "like Adam." How remarkable it is that so little mention is ever made of the first man in the English translation! Of course in the original Scriptures "Adam" occurs again and again under various forms, as, "Thou son of man," or, "Son of Adam"; but hardly any reference of a personal and specific kind is ever made to the first man. Everybody seems to have been only too glad to forget him. If he cannot forget himself, what a life he must have been leading these countless centuries! He is restored, however, in this verse: "But they like Adam have transgressed the covenant."

Can anything be more mysterious and bewildering than (vii. 4):

"As an oven heated by the baker, who ceaseth from raising after he hath kneaded the dough, until it be leavened"?

No man can explain these words as they stand in the English Bible; but alter them, as the Revision does, into "He ceaseth to stir the fire from the kneading of the dough," and you have a picture of men whose passions are so hot that it is needless to stir the fire, or add additional fuel. The lust burns like hell, that the baker can do no more.

"I have written to him the great things of my law" (viii. 12).

How beautiful is the change into, "Though I write for him my law in ten thousand precepts"! Not "great things of my law," but my law split up into ten thousand little laws or precepts that a child might commit to heart. If I say to him, Thou shalt not have all the law at once, for that might overpower thee, but thou shalt have the law little by little—now an infantile precept, now a larger statute, now a broader ordinance; and if I am proceeding too quickly for thee, then I will stop on thy account, and what is a thousand shall be ten thousand, so that little by little thou

mayest be educated into wisdom and into obedience, and into the truly spiritual purpose of God, is anything lost by such a change as that? Much is gained by it.

"He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and by his strength he had power with God" (xii. 3).

Where? When? We cannot understand these words, and yet their meaning is perfectly evident when they are thus translated: "In the womb he took his brother by the heel, and in his manhood he had power with God." Thus the man is taken at two different points in his history: he began by an exhibition of power, his little hand was strong even at the first—destiny can hardly be hidden even in protoplasm; and this man who began thus early grew into larger power, yea, in his manhood he wrestled with God. A wondrous page in the development of human strength; a marvellous page in the illustration of divine condescension.

How many sermons have been preached from (xiii. 9)

"O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help."

All that is true; great discourses may be preached upon this interpreted text. Sometimes the discourse may be true, but not true to the passage upon which it is founded; sometimes there is an absolute divorce between the sermon and the text, both being good, but neither related to the other. It is better as it stands in the Revision: "It is thy destruction, O Israel, that thou art against me, against thy help,"—the supreme madness, the ineffable and all but incurable insanity.

One more, as illustrative of the Revision in this minor prophet:—

"So will we render the calves of our lips" (xiv. 2).

An expression absolutely without meaning. We read it respectfully because it is in the English Bible; it must be right, because it is there. What, then, is the meaning? The signification is brought out beautifully by the Revision: "So will we render thee the thankful praise of our lips instead of bullocks' blood." Thus up to this time men have been offering bullock, and heifer, and lamb, and goat; but the time has now come when our lips shall be calves, our praise shall be the offered bullock. No longer shall there be blood-letting in thy Church, but there

shall be praise instead of blood. We will render thee the calves of our lips, the calves of our praise ; we will give thee hymns of adoration, because we know that this was the meaning of every sacrifice of blood that thou ever didst command. Thus we grow from the material to the spiritual, from the visible to the invisible, from things rough, coarse, elementary, to things refined, exquisite, final. The great end of the creation of man is that at last and for ever he should sing, the song being the highest expression of service ; not the service itself, but the delight which man takes in doing all that God has told him to do.

Is the Bible, then, taken away from us by these changes ? What is it that you worship ? If you only worship a book in a certain form, then you are as much idolaters as any savage tribe ever found on the face of the globe. You must seek for the inner truth, the spiritual meaning ; and let go whatever forms you may, you must never let go the divine thought, the divine purpose. We must not be given to bibliolatry ; we must know that the Bible is within the Bible ; we must more and more feel that no man can touch the Scriptures of God injuriously, fatally ; the revelation abides. There may be persons who have deluded themselves with the thought that the very translation was inspired. The thing that is inspired is the truth ; and all language is growing towards its larger and clearer expression. That there is a truth to be unfolded, illuminated, and applied, the conscience of man continually proclaims. We should ask for that truth, and if we have to pay down for it the price of many an old custom and many an old prejudice, we must pay the price more or less willingly, that we may possess the pearl of great price, the truth of God. Nothing necessary to salvation has been touched by all the revisions that have ever taken place, personal or official. The Christ has never been other than a Christ. The Son of God has never been modified as to his personality or function. All that has been changed is of the nature of grammar, history, incident. God's love has never been lessened ; God's grace has never been contracted into smaller channels by any grammatical changes. All the changes that have been made have only lifted Christ to a higher elevation, and invested the idea of God with a supreamer royalty, a more subduing pathos.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou art the great Shepherd. Thy flock is dear unto thee; if one has gone astray thou wilt come after it and seek it until thou dost find it. This is our hope, as it is our joy; in thy patient love we find the reason of our song. All we like sheep had gone astray, we had turned every one to his own way; now we have returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, now thou hast fed us with promises; we shall be gathered upon the high mountains of Israel, we shall be within reach of showers of blessings; thou wilt make us thine own by a seal which cannot be broken. Having then these promises of thine, may we accept them as inspirations; may we not rest upon them slothfully, may we accept them as impulses towards nobler service, that we may glorify our Father which is in heaven. Jesus Christ said, I am the good Shepherd; the good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. He laid down his life for men; he said he had power to lay it down, and power to take it again. Having been saved by his death, how much more shall we be saved by his life. We have passed his Cross, we are under the dominion of his crown. Rule in us, Jesus, Son of Man, Son of God. Once we would not have thee to reign over us, now we have no king but Jesus. We bless God for the King-Shepherd, the royal and final David, the Shepherd of redeemed souls. Lord, Shepherd, hear us, keep us, watch us; we are prone to wander, we love to stray: keep us by the mighty tenderness of thy grace. We rejoice that we have heard of the Shepherd, and that we are in the fold by his grace and love: may we prove ourselves to be of the flock of the Redeemer, not by our pride and vanity, but by our obedience and discipline, and love of others, by our broad and ever-broadening charity; may we in our turn be shepherds of the weak, taking care of those who are helpless, and leading back those who have gone a little astray. Lord, hear us whilst we thank thee for thy shepherdly care, for thy tender, loving, daily oversight. We thank thee for life, though it is full of pain, as we bless thee for the sky, though it is so often dark with clouds. One day thou hast promised we shall be rid of all things evil and distressing; in our language there shall be no word but that which is musical. In that higher land, in that brighter, larger time, men shall not say one to another, I am sick: out of the language of men thou wilt drive every unwelcome and distressful word. In the prepared place there shall be no sin, no pain, no death, no night: these will be forgotten words; thou wilt teach us another speech and a purer language, and we shall speak of light, and love, and truth, and growth, and all things beautiful. Towards that high point thou art drawing us day by day, through wildernesses weird and desolate, through disappointments stinging and fiery, and through all

the trouble of the earth. Thou hast not forsaken the flock: no man shall pluck any out of the Father's hand. Give us to feel the comfort of thy hand; may we know that we are not keeping ourselves; hold thou us up, and we shall be safe. We pray for our loved ones, part of ourselves, not with us in this act of worship,—for the father, the husband, the traveller; the man who is sick; the woman who is at home making it brighter for us; the child at school. We pray thee for those who are unhappily further away, men who never pray for themselves, men whose lives are blasphemies; may our prayer be heard at the Cross when we say again, God be merciful unto all sinners. Thou knowest where special comfort is needed, where lives are sad, where there is no strength, no hope; thou knowest the homes in which there has been no song these seven years; all our disappointments thou dost know: the letter brings no answer, the appeal elicits no response; pain brings forth no tear of sympathy. Thou knowest the misery of solitude, and of being misunderstood by men; thou knowest how irregular some of us are in make, and thought, and practice, so that we plunge ourselves into misunderstanding, and are made the victims of our own folly. Yet thou wilt pity us, thou wilt make us over again, thou wilt not forsake thy flock. Shepherd of Israel, Christ of the universe, enfold us within thine arms! Amen.

Chapter i.

THE MINISTRY OF SORROW.

A WONDERFUL book is this prophecy of Hosea [B.C. 800–725]. The man himself at once attracts our sympathy and regard by his personal sufferings. There is no teacher of divine truth to be compared for one moment for excellence so deep and great as trouble. You can learn but little in the schools. Information, except for temporary purposes, is worthless. Well-informed men, if they be nothing more, are oftentimes hindrances and discouragements to those who, not having had their advantages, are conscious of aspirations and possibilities which do not lie within the range of mere intelligence, and which cannot be satisfied or realised by any amount of information. A well-informed man may be a nuisance; his information may tend to the increase of his vanity; but when information is followed by a sanctified moral excellence it becomes valuable and helpful for educational and religious purposes. Hosea had an infinite sorrow at home; therefore he was so great and tender a teacher of divine truth. He read everything through his tears; hence the enlargement, the colour, the variety, the striking beauty of his visions. Men who have never been in the valley of the shadow of death

may amuse us, delight us, cheer us, and in some subsidiary ways may help us ; but sorrow only can enrich the voice. When the sorrow is home grief it assumes a tenderer quality ; yea, there is on it a bloom such as can only be wrought by the ministry of the sun at mid-day.

Hosea had sorrow of the deepest kind. Gomer the daughter of Diblaim was the daughter of the devil.* Hosea had no peace, no rest, no singing joy within the four corners of his own house. He lived in clouds ; his life was a continual passage through a sea deeper than the Red Sea ; if we may vary the figure, his wandering was in the wilderness, unblessed, cursed by the very spirit of desolation. He had children, but they had evil names ; their very names were millstones round the prophet's neck. If one of them had a name historically and ideally beautiful, it was to be used for the expression of judgment and vengeance ; for even Jezreel, so glorious geographically, was to be a very tragedy in the judgments which it introduced and exemplified. As for the others, one represented the vanished mercy of God, and the other represented the alienation of the people from God, and the alienation of God from the people. Sometimes when there is no joy between the adults of the house, there may be a kind of intermediate joy in consequence of the presence of the children ; they will laugh and say childish things, and will touch some vein of humour or fancy ; they who look sourly at one another, and with the bitterness of distrust, may be melted into sympathy because of the miracle wrought by infantile genius. It was not so in the house of Hosea. A common sorrow like an unbroken cloud rested upon the house and upon its weary life. This man will do us good then.

Only sorrow should read some parts of the Bible, because only sorrow could have written them. How many sing the words of

* "The narrative of Hosea's marriage some (Augustine, Grotius, Horsley) regard as literal history ; others suppose that a marriage with an Israelitish woman is all that is intended ; but most (Jerome, Rosenm., Louth, Hengs.) regard it as allegory only, or as a vision. It may be added, that the narrative-exactness of the whole, and the use of names, are as consistent with the supposition that it is a parable or vision, as with the supposition that it is a real occurrence which is described, Ezek. xxiii. ; Luke xvi. 20-31."—ANGUS.

poets they never understand ! You cannot sing a man's music properly until you know the man himself ; until you are familiar with the genius of the musician ; until, indeed, you have some acquaintance with his deepest experiences. Notes are more than notes. A fool can be taught the staff ; but who can be one with the musician, live with him, in the sanctuary of his genius, in all the variety of his experience ; who can be wild with his madness, sober with his gravity, sullen with his melancholy, and joyous to rioting and trumpeting and rapture with his ineffable gladness ? Then we may begin to sing something of what he has written. But the great psalmists of the age are not to be interpreted by frivolous children ; they can only be interpreted, rendered, and expressed by those who have been comrades of their sorrow and companions of their joy.

Hosea will have a tone of his own ; he will talk like nobody else ; he will be an eccentric, peculiar individual ; he will begin when he pleases, and he will take a circuit marked out for him by an invisible guide ; but now and again he will come down to the road we travel, and will present us with flowers and fruits, and will say little sweet sentences to us that shall be as angels, covered with light, and tremulous with music. The sorrow of Hosea was symbolic. The Lord meant it to be so. All sorrow, as well as all joy, is meant to be typical. Hosea's cloud was not meant for his own house alone ; he was to hear voices in that cloud which he was to repeat to all Israel, and all Judah, and all time. We divest the little books of the Bible and the great books of all their noblest meaning by dwarfing them into local pamphlets, tracts which referred only to the passing day, with its darting showers and glancing sunbeams and variety of nothingness. Whoso has sorrow is meant to be a teacher ; whoso has joy is meant to be a gospeller, an evangelist, a good-news-man. You have no right to the exclusive use of your own sorrow ; you weep that you may shed tears with the common trouble of the world. Men are not to be laughed out of their losses, their gains, their troubles, and the clouds that overshadow and overweight them ; they will know the voice of comradeship ; they will say instantly : This is the language of truest experience and richest friendship ; the man who speaks to me now speaks from a great height ; he

is eminent, if not in the manner of his words, in their spirit and accent and emphasis. You have no right to the exclusive proprietorship of your own household joys. They were meant to make the people in the other house as glad as you are. You cannot drink that goblet of joy, and then dry your lips as if nothing had happened ; what you have imbibed of gladness should be an inspiration to all who come within your influence. Weep with them that weep ; rejoice with them that do rejoice ; enter into the common fellowship of the world, and make your contribution ungrudgingly and lavishly and eagerly, as if you had been waiting for the opportunity.

Sorrow should only be silent for a time ; by-and-by it should find all its words, refine, enlarge and dignify them, and pass them on as messages, bright as gospels, rich as the oldest wine of heaven's infinite vineyard. Thus the Bible maintains its supremacy. At noon of summer's longest day we do not ask for the Bible ; the open air is enough, the green leaves, and the singing birds, and the blushing flowers, and the garden that seems to multiply itself until it occupies the whole earth—these are quite enough for us ; but when the company breaks up, and the leaves fall and the birds begin to go elsewhere—for they, poor little faithless ones, follow the sun, they do not follow men ; they never say, Here is a little cluster of men gathered in garden party, let us sing to them ; not they, they follow the light,—and when the birds have gone and the flowers are dead and the garden has withdrawn, then we want comfort, cheer, hospitality, stimulus. Where can we find all these as in the divine old book ? It is because it speaks to men in their deepest experience that it cannot be deposed from its primacy of spiritual influence. It knows us ; it searches us through and through ; it has the noblest words for our sorrow, the purest music for our joy, and all the notes between it can utter with a precision and exquisiteness impossible to all other books. Hosea would, then, in a sense, share his sorrow. But for his own sorrow he never could have understood God's grief. Again and again God asks us to look at him through ourselves :—" Like as a father . . . so the Lord " : that is the key of the Bible ; that is the key of Providence ; that is the key of the Cross : omit that basis line from your theology, and your theology

is a cloud without water ; only a shadow, dark, spectral, barren, promising much and giving nothing. You could never understand God's love until you found that your own child had stabbed you to the heart ; you never knew the meaning of sorrow as it is experienced in heaven until you looked round and found your disappointed eyes confronted by emptiness. When it was told you that the vacant chair would not be filled that day because the prodigal had gone, then you read the Bible as no lettered priest or scribe ever read it. You knew nothing of life until you had been desolated by death. When there were only two of you in the house, and one lay dead and speechless, then you knew what the critics could never tell you of Bible truth, divine presence, and divine purpose ; then you saw beyond the veil, and there stole into your soul a courage that loved the very image of death ; there came into your spirit an inspiration that made death itself a silent friend.

So the Lord will put Hosea to school ; and so he will put all his prophets and apostles through their education. Happy they who come up out of household trouble, public disappointment, and social criticism, and loss and desolation, to pray larger prayers, and offer to those who are outside a larger hospitality of love and rest. If sorrow make us narrower in thought and purpose, then sorrow has failed to convey God's meaning to the soul. Sorrow should open the heart-door, so that no man can shut it, that all may enter in who need comfort and quietness, and peace and hope.

Yet the Lord cannot be angry all day. He breaks down like a woman ; he thunders in terrible judgment, and at the end of the thunder he pronounces the benediction. Hosea is full of *but's* and *yet's* and *therefore's*, which the critics say ought to be *nevertheless's* ; but after all these words there come gospels broad as dawning day, dewy as the eyelids of the morning. After such words as the Lord puts into the mouth of the prophet you would say a gospel was impossible ; yet as the rippling plough goes before the sowing hand, so God's judgment goes before God's mercy, God's desolations prepare the way for God's benefactions. When I am weak, then am I strong. After poverty shall come wealth ; after well-borne disappointment shall come sunny con-

tentment, serenest tranquillity and peace :—" But I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them." We knew he would break down. Jonah knew it, and was angry. The Lord said, Art thou angry because I have had compassion upon that great city? And Jonah said, I am. The Lord said, Doest thou well to be angry? And Jonah said, I do—because Jonah was little, incomplete, imperfect, infirm in temper, wanting not only in imagination, but in the true compassion which would sacrifice all heaven if by doing so one poor lost child could be brought home again. Prophets like their own prophecies to be fulfilled. Jonah did not like to be made a fool of; it was very important that Jonah, having gone up and down the streets of Nineveh, saying, "In forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown," should be looked upon in the evening of the last day as a very respectable person. He studied the dignity of the ministry. Jonah's respectability was infinitely greater than Nineveh's salvation. So he was petulant and furious and wholly absurd.

How will the Lord carry out his purpose of mercy? Already he begins to be spiritual in his method of salvation—"not by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen." This is a point in history. - All outward, visible, material salvations are driven away; a grand supersession of these is now to take place. For a long time men could understand no salvation but that which was physical. When they heard that ten thousand horses were coming down the hill they began to feel, as it were, safe; when some quick-eared sufferer caught the first blast of the trumpet of an approaching host they who were in prison began to sing, because they were made perfectly sure that their salvation was at hand. There came a time in the history of the world, as given in the development of the Bible, when God dispensed with all manner of mechanical auxiliaries, as bow and sword and battle, and horses and horsemen. God hath chosen the foolish things and the weak things and the non-existent things that he may work out all his glorious purpose. Without a single horseman on the field he will open the gate and deliver the prisoner, and give joy to those who have only fed on tears and bread of affliction. The Lord delighteth not in the legs of a man; the Lord is not dependent upon the strength of a horse, though his neck be

clothed with thunder, and his nostrils be scarlet with energy. The Lord delivers spiritually; he comes invisibly; a thousand angels start on their journey when he bids them arise and depart, and save those who are in extremity. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble; therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be cast into the midst of the sea." Amid all the seas, oceans on oceans piled, and thunder on thunder heaped, there is a river, a little silver stream, that maketh glad the City of God: the river shall be more useful than the sea, the stream shall have in it more water than the Atlantic; there shall be a deeper calm amid the apparently little inheritance which God gives to his people than there is in all the plentifulness of antiquity.

Then we come upon one of Hosea's yets. Lo-ruhamah had been weaned, Lo-ammi had been born, and it seemed as if the night continued in all its wild and stormy darkness; but in verse 10 we have "Yet." What weaving is this, of storm and peace, winter and summer, wilderness and paradise! what wondrous weaving have we here! Oh, that flying busy shuttle! What is it doing? now a judgment, and now a hymn of peace. What is to come of it all? How will the day end?

"Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God" (ver. 10).

What a chapter! How like an April day, beginning in anger, in swift darting showers, every drop a spear point; and ending in brightest June, in such a wealth of light, in such an infinity of peace. This may be an apocalypse, a hint. This may come true of us. We have had sorrow, difficulty, toil, travail, misery: who can say that at eventide there shall not be light, and in the calm sunset we shall not forget the battle of early day?

Chapter ii. 8.

"For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal."

AGNOSTICISM.

THE youngest reader of the Bible will be able to understand the words "They did not know." There is a theory which is known to-day by the difficult name Agnosticism. A great deal of worthless thinking may be hidden under that dark term. Let us understand what it means, and then inquire what it is worth. The meaning is supposed to be *not-know-ism*. Men do not now blatantly and vulgarly say, "There is no God"; that is generally considered now to be a fool's peculiar speech: now men say, If there is a God, we do not know him; he does not come within the range of our observation, experience, or consciousness; we do not say there is no God, we simply say we do not know him. That is the meaning, in general terms, of the doctrine that is known under the name of Agnosticism. If it were an intellectual doctrine only, there might appear to be about it somewhat of the charm of modesty. How can a man look otherwise than blankly humble when he says he does not know? What attitude would befit such a declaration but an attitude of the profoundest self-distrust and self-disregard? But it is not only an intellectual doctrine; it is infinitely more. What great case does the intellect wholly cover? Is man all intellect, all intelligence; is he a repertory of information; is he well nourished and well furnished with mere news or facts or historical memories? Agnosticism cannot begin and end where it likes; even though it bear such a name as that, full of syllables, we must not let it have all its own way. Even Agnosticism must not be allowed to run riot over the church floor and the church altar, and put aside everything as if it alone represented the consummation of wisdom, speculation, and cherished thinking. "She did not

know that I gave her corn": so Agnosticism was not only an intellectual deprivation; it was a moral insensibility.

Do not imagine that religion touches only the intellectual faculties. You cannot dismiss God, and then be as good and wise and true and beneficent as if you had acknowledged him in all the mystery of his triune personality. If you think you can thus treat religion, then religion is one of the things you have not begun to understand. God cannot be expelled from the intellect without the moral quality of the whole nature going down; without the heart also being as agnostic as the mind. Think of an agnostic heart! The life plucks all the grapes in the vineyard and all the flowers in the garden, and enjoys all the light of the sun, and when it is asked whence came they, it says, "I do not know." So, then, we have not only to deal with intellectual modesty, falsely so-called; we have to deal with a great moral deprivation; with the irrational case of a rational being eating, drinking, thriving on innumerable bounties, and not knowing whence they came, or whom to thank for a banquet so profuse. The great difficulties will lie in that direction. The dear, meek, modest, self-renouncing, self-humiliating, intellectual agnostic who sits down and says, "I do not know," does not end the case. We could get over his intellectual ignorance. Tell me that a dog does not know the hand that gives him food, and you will prove him to be but a dog; but do not tell me that rational, intelligent, educated, civilised, progressive beings can be eating, drinking, enjoying, yea, and taking the higher meanings of things in a certain poetic sense, without ever asking, What hand is behind, giving, controlling? That would be a miracle, exciting and justifying the incredulity of mankind. All persons, but especially the young, should guard themselves against the mock humility which says respecting God, "I do not know him"; because not to know the Eternal, is not to know the temporal; not to confess with adoring reverence the impenetrable metaphysic of theology, is not to know what hand painted the lily, or guides the fowls of the air in all their wanderings.

Agnosticism is a larger question than any that can be limited to the mere dry intellect. And Agnosticism of this kind means not only deprivation of moral sensibility, as expressed in the action

of gratitude, but it makes responsibility at once frivolous and impossible. Responsible to whom? Let us say, responsible to society. Did society light the sun? Does society marshal the seasons in their order? Does society balance these wondrous lights that gleam in the infinite spaces? Does society make harvest? Let us put the case analogically thus: the captain, the officers in charge of the great vessel filled with passengers, say to these passengers, We ignore everything that does not come within our own control; we cannot be held responsible for things which lie immeasurably beyond us; we will therefore take you and do the best we can for you on the sea; you shall have good accommodation, you shall have an excellent table; we will do what we can to entertain you with conversation, and we will hold a very mirthful and exhilarating fellowship one with another; but as to guiding the ship by the north star, or having anything to do with any sort of star whatsoever, we do not dream of it—our responsibilities are social. Will you go with that agnostic captain? You would not send a dog with him that you value. There is a larger responsibility. Responsibility does not lie between one man and another alone; there are responsibilities that take in far-away views, grand considerations, immeasurable quantities, ministries and mysteries boundless and infinite. Responsibility never reaches its true realisation until it touches the point of reverence—simple, earnest, continual dependence upon God, otherwise responsibility will be a calculation—it will be an arrangement of postures and attitudes, it will take upon itself the form of a selfish reckoning, so that so much done shall mean so much returned: that responsibility may be represented by the balance; so much on the one side, so much on the other; such the total, such the dividend. When men talk so they do not know the meaning of responsibility. When a man denies God he cannot do his duty to his fellow man. Yet there is a sense in which he can be dutiful, honourable, beneficent, useful; but that is a limited sense; lacking the mystery of religion, it lacks its reverence; lacking reverence, it lacks depth; lacking depth, it will soon wither away.

So even Agnosticism is not the easy light-mannered method of getting rid of God and religious thought and religious obligation;

a sweet new modest way of throwing off eternity. Do not misunderstand this *not-know-ism*. The man that does not know God does not know himself. A philosophy profound to infinity is that which says : All commandments sum themselves in two directions—love to God and love to man ; the one being the root of the other. No man can love God without loving God's image as seen in human kind. Theology—not formal and scientific, but spiritual and inspired—is the fount and origin of beneficence, and exalted morality. If any instances that indicate discrepancy should occur to the memory of criticism, these instances only prove that the religion is absent : not because of religion, but for want of it do men disregard social duties and human rights.

What is God's reply to Agnosticism ? His answer is given in these words :—

“Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax given to cover her nakedness” (ver. 9).

This is rational, this is just, this is simple, and it is impossible for it to escape the approval of mankind. Where God is not known, why should he continue his bounty ? Who will throw life away ? Who will throw flowers into the darkness ? Is not that a wastefulness forbidden by every instinct,—not knowing the prohibition of a written law, but prohibited by the interdict of instinct, and bearing upon itself the approval of eternal righteousness ? Is it a grateful exercise to be sending messages to people who do not know the writer or inquire for him, or reply to his communications ? Is it a delightful and inspiring exercise to be giving bread, and the persons receiving it not knowing whence it came, or caring as to the name and character of the giver ? It may be so ; but where the giving of the bread is meant not to end in itself, but to lead to other, further, brighter, grander results, who can waste his energy in the conduct of processes which have no termination ? God never gives bread by itself. Jesus Christ never healed a blind man merely that the blind man might see the wonderful things round about him—that would have been childish and frivolous ; Jesus Christ opened the eyes of the blind that he might lead the man to think whether it would not be better still to have the vision of his soul illumined

so that he could see the mystery of the divine action in universe and history.

So when God gives bread to the body he does not want to keep our bones together, a mechanism anatomical ; he only feeds the body that he may get at the soul. God has therefore determined that if men do not know him, or ask concerning him, or recognise the purpose of his ministry, he will come down and claim his corn and wine and wool and flax. This is just. God must keep some control over things. It is good of him now and then to send a bad harvest ; it is excellent management to blight the wheat-field, and make the people mad with hunger. That is love. Presently they will begin to ask questions, to wonder ; and there is a kind of amazement which nearly touches religion, approaching the mysterious line which separates the highest wonder from the beginning of the profoundest reverence. It was good of God to take away the one ewe lamb ; it was infinitely merciful of him to strike down the only tree we had—one little tree, and God wrenched it out of the earth by its dry roots, and shook the black soil back, and burned the tree. What did he mean by it ? To teach us that it was his tree, not ours. You have no children, except in a very secondary and temporary sense. The Lord looks down from heaven and says : My children ; my corn, my wine, my wool, my flax ; all souls are mine ; the gold and the silver are mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. There is but one Proprietor. Yet we call ourselves landlords ! It pleases us, poor babies ; it gives a man importance in his own family, if nowhere else, to call himself a landlord. Not an inch of land does any one of us possess. There are no landlords ; in fact, there are no lords at all. Not until we realise that we are stewards, servants, trustees, people occupying responsible positions, shall we begin to realise the true dignity of life. He is the landlord in veriest truth who holds the land in trust, for cultivation, for the feeding of the poor and the maintenance of the State. He is aristocratic with more than nominal profession who says, My strength belongs to the weak man ; my wisdom is the refuge of the unintelligent ; my experience is a bank ; and I allow all men known to me, who care to do so, to trade upon my treasure, for I hold it on their account. The

Lord comes to take back the things that belong to him, and he takes them back with a weary and aching heart. The Lord does not like to take anything back ; he meant us to have it when he gave it ; he giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not ; he never means to reclaim in any sense of rebuke whatever he has bestowed upon us. He says to us rather, Use it, dear children ; make the best of it ; I mean it for your gladness, and he who eats my harvests with a thankful heart doubles them ; he who blesses his bread before breaking it will find more at the end than there was at the beginning.

What is the issue of this Agnosticism ?

"I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons and her sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts. And I will destroy her vines and her fig trees, whereof she hath said, These are my rewards that my lovers have given me : and I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall eat them " (vers. 11, 12).

This is not vengeance, this is reason ; this is not arbitrary punishment, this is a natural consequence and necessity. Divine gifts are abused, are misunderstood, or in some sense resented : what if divine patience should be outworn, or if only through a temporary suspension of his fortunes man can be brought to consideration ? Recognise the greatness of things, the manifold relationships of life, and understand that Providence is not an arbitrary beneficence, but a critical and discriminating ministry. And there comes a time when God will say to the cloud, Rain no more on that unthankful life ; and to the sun, No longer shine on ingratitude so base and desperate. This is God's method ; it is not mysterious ; it is simple, frank, direct, intelligible, and just. If there be any fat, prosperous, gross atheists, so there be fat beasts maturing for the knife and the poleaxe. Do not misunderstand the outward and temporary prosperity of wickedness. It has been the mystery of the ages, but the mystery has been again and again dissolved, and men have seen the action of the divine Sovereignty, even in instances that appeared to prosper without the altar and without the revelation of the Word.

Does it all end here ? God cannot end at a point like this. There is a divine rhetoric that requires other syllables to complete

the Gospel sentence ; it would be poor reading if it ended here. God goes from judgment to Gospel :—

“Therefore [the critics say, Nevertheless], behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope : and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt” (vers. 14, 15).

So, we repeat, God cannot be angry all day ; he breaks down, he proposes reconciliation. The Cross is not a human thought ; it is an eternal proposal of love. The Lamb of God was slain from before the foundation of the world. We have often had occasion to say, the atonement was rendered before the sin was committed. God cannot be second ; we cannot surprise him into new movements. The Gospel, as we understand it, occupies a certain historic or chronological point as to its revelation and framework, but in its innermost thought—who is this that cometh up from eternity ? It is the Son of God, who, ere the universe arose, either by divine fiat, or from fire-cloud, or how it might, was slain for the sin of the world. Gracious mystery ! Blessed fact !

“Jesus, Lover of my soul,
Let me to thy bosom fly.”

Chapter iv. 1-6.

THE LORD'S CONTROVERSY.

"Hear the word of the Lord, ye children of Israel: for the Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land" (ver. 1).

IT was a wonderful thing to try to conceive—supposing it to be merely an act of the imagination—what God would say if he condescended to use human speech. Who can find words fit for the lips of such a God as is described in Holy Scripture? We have been so accustomed to read words said to have been uttered by God that our familiarity has deprived us of a good deal of rich profit that would have arisen from a deep consideration of the inquiry, What words are worthy of the lips of such a God as is portrayed in the Bible? There are gods for whom we could find words too good; we would not allow their livid lips to touch some of our words; they would spoil them. They are mean gods—images that are nailed to their own timber; idols that are stained into the plaster of the wall; frescoed divinities, imaginary deities, who revel and riot and practise wickedness in their cloudy residences. There are words of ours we would not allow them to touch—as father, mother, child, home, love, purity, honour; if they ventured to touch one of these words, and turn it to their own uses, we should say, Stop, thief! Our inquiry relates to the kind of God, the quality of deity, that is indicated in the Bible. Who can find words for such a God? Who can make him speak in fit eloquence? It must be dignified, lofty without measure; yet it must have in it a mystery of condescension, a touch of familiarity, a home colour that will not affright even the eyes of children.

This question of inspiration is a much larger one than comes within the four corners of any mechanical theory. Here is a God, real or invented; if invented, a greater wonder than if he is

real. Invented by whom? Here is a choice of words that cannot be amended. Men may try to elevate and refine this language, and they confessedly fail. Even when they want to speak their mother tongue they come back to the old Bible; when they want to touch the heart most deeply, and bring it to humiliation and tears of sympathy and heroic act, they go to the uninspired man-made Bible for their eloquence. Can this be so? The heart has its rights here as well as the intellect; the natural and cultivated instincts have their claim as well as the pedantic critical faculty. Man is not all finger, he is not all mere criticism; he has within him, and as necessary parts of him, soul, feeling, sympathy, conscious need, a wondrous other deeper self that is sure of the spiritual, the supernatural, the angelic, the divine. The Bible is full of "the word of the Lord," and the claim of prophet, major and minor, is, Hear it! We are brought, as it were, together in this conversation, namely, God and man. Here is no mysterious attempt to mediate between the speaker and the hearer, as who should say, I only, selected functionary of heaven, have heard God speak, and I will tell you what he has said to me, and you must not go further than myself; you must finish your inquiry with my personality; my priestly authority must begin and end the limit of the interview. There is no such intolerable impiety and senselessness in the Scripture. The great word is, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." Know your election to this apostleship of hearing by the sensitiveness of your ears. There are ears that hear nothing, eyes that see nothing, hearts that understand nothing; he who has the faculty has the election, and is chosen of God to hear the word immediately and directly, and to answer it with many prayers and rivers of tears.

What is announced by the prophet after this bold appeal to human attention? "The Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land." All controversy does not lie between man and man; it is not an affair of words, it is not a contention of rival claims, or a collision of competitive ambitions; when we have adjusted and settled all our little uproars by some method of arbitration the world is still not at rest; there is an unsettled claim, there is a plea that cannot be easily silenced. We may

try to stifle the utterance of that plea, but at unexpected times the plea reasserts itself with aggravated poignancy. What are these broader and grander contentions that trouble our history, and will not let us find rest on the pillows of our compromises? They are God's challenges, appeals, scrutinies, and judgments. There are religious questions to settle before the world can be tranquillised. This fact is not realised by many students of history. They do not touch the reality of the cases because they deal with policies, covenants, commercial treaties, social relationships, and the like; as if the world were complete in itself, and had no relation to the highest court; as if the world were self-existing, forgetting that it hangs upon the hands of God. We cannot settle questions by coming to an understanding amongst ourselves. Nothing is right until we have acquainted ourselves with God through his Son Jesus Christ, the Priest of the universe, and have realised peace through the Cross. After that all adjustments become easy. Why is it that even human contentions are difficult of settlement? Simply because they lack atmosphere. What is meant by the term "atmosphere" in this connection? Spirit. The actions themselves are square, well cut, cleverly arranged, and the policy drawn with a skilled hand, away to its last iota; but the atmosphere of good feeling, high reason, noble philanthropy, Christianised humanity is wanting, and for lack of spiritual atmosphere our mechanisms cannot cohere; they fall to pieces, and require continual rebuilding that they may perpetrate the trick of continual dissolution. Realise God's action, divine providence, the ghostly ministry; and remember that right is a word which is not to be defined by other words, but is to be realised after communion with the eternal righteousness.

Why has God a controversy? The reason is self-commending and self-vindicating. "Because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land." We can subject this charge to the test of facts; here we are upon ground which admits the claim and the function of reason and criticism. God will have a controversy so long as truth is wanting; he will have every wall built plumb; if the wall is not plumb it must come down; the sun will not have it; the stars are annoyed by it; it is a cripple that might be healed and will not, therefore it must be

torn to pieces ; every star that swings itself around the eternal centre is offended by things that will not bear the test of geometry. God will not have truthlessness, falsity, painted falsity worst of all, for the paint is lost upon it, and the money that paints it might have been given to the poor. God will have all things square, upright, real, good through and through, as good under the cloak as above it, and round about it, and until that is brought about he will have a controversy with the land and with the individual, and with the house and with the business ; and when you have piled your money millions high, yet there is at the heart of it a thief ; he will tear it down, he will throw it away, and he will leave you to find out the reason of this act of deprivation and scattering. Think ; consider ; do not play the fool. God will not rest his criticism at the point of truth only ; he says there is no "mercy." In the Hebrew this word "mercy" is a full word ; it involves and necessitates everything that is of the nature of love, pity, kindness, brotherly fellowship, philanthropic obligation ; it is not a condescending act, as who shall say, I will have mercy upon you, exercising a prerogative almost divine ; it is a word that means natural love, spiritual love, real, true, self-sacrificial love. God notices the absence of this ; he will not let the earth alone ; he will drown it, he will burn it, he will utterly wreck it, and then he will put the pieces all together again, and start afresh. God cannot be at rest whilst there is an unhealed hand in all his universe. The universe was not built as a cripple house. So long as one tongue is silent something is wrong ; so long as one act of mercy, pity, love, compassion, tenderness is not done, the anthem cannot be sung in all the infinite breadth and grandeur of its meaning. What a wondrous man he was who invented this God ! We are to infer therefore that God will cease the trouble on the return of truth, mercy, and spiritual knowledge. A mechanical consolation is impossible ; only a spiritual revolution and settlement will determine the harmony and tranquillity of the universe.

Thus far, however, the charge may be said to be negative,—

"No truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God."

But the impeachment now assumes a positive aspect :—

‘By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood’ (ver. 2).

We cannot tell the meaning of this in English. In the language in which Hosea wrote these are known as nouns of action ; they have nothing abstract or merely suggestive or memorial about them ; they are solid actions, as who should say, Turn where you may you will meet swearing, lying, killing, stealing, and the like. The image is awfully concrete. You are not dealing with lying only, but with visible, actual, bare-faced lies ; lying has come out of its abstract retirements and gradations of approach, and stands there a concrete effrontery. Well might God have a trouble with the land. The land cannot rest in merely negative impiety. We cannot be agnostics only. The negative prepares for the positive. Where there is no truth the lie will certainly come in and say : Here is an open place where I can build my black house, and invent my next imposture. Where there is no love, no pity, no mercy, cruelty and oppression can come in and say : Here I will whet my axe, and trim the edge of my sword, that I may go out to-morrow and slay and desolate the world. A man cannot rest at not going to church ; it is impossible to remain at the point of saying, We will not read the Bible. That “not,” that dreary, desolate negative, becomes an opportunity for the display of all evil ministries and mischievous actions. Take care how you begin the deprivation of the soul. To deplete the mind is to invite ignorance and make it welcome. The Lord, therefore, is himself exercising pity in the very act of delivering this judgment, for he says, “They break out”—the action is that of violence ; a wicked, malignant, determined trespasser, who will not stop at bounds and lines, but who will outrage all moral limitations,—“and blood toucheth blood” ; literally bloods touch bloods ; and God never made this green earth for any such spectacle. He made the earth for flowers and fruits ; he started the world himself with a garden, and he meant that garden to grow until it covered every inch of the responsive land. When therefore blood touches blood, when war goes forth to desolate the nations of the earth, and when through exercise of cruelty and wrong and injustice the whole social fabric bleeds from head to foot, God says he will controvert the case, and plague the doers of the wrong.

"Therefore shall the land mourn, and everyone that dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away" (ver. 3).

The bad man not only spoils his spiritual relations, he spoils the whole earth; the fishes of the sea are uneasy because the altar has been thrown down; the birds of the air, once so clear of voice, so tender and expressive in note, are choked and stifled because the sanctuary is violated and the Cross is abandoned by scornful hearts; the earth that brought forth autumnally will bring forth no more; she will not feed the beasts that have spoiled her. Behind all mysteries there is an explanation. There is nothing profound in the suggestion of certain scientific men who say, Do not blame God for bad harvests. After all that suggestion is not so awfully profound. When we first heard it we thought it was marvellous; we have lived to see that there is nothing in it. Bad harvests may, after all, under some circumstances have to be accounted for religiously. We are inclined to think that there may be quite as much wisdom on the one side as on the other, and that, after all, the religious suggestion may have in it the more force of reason. The Bible never hesitates to connect the earth and the heaven, the facts of history with the government of God's throne. It is easy to deny all this; but denial is not a necessary expression and proof of supernatural genius. We may be cheated by the denials of other men. The more positive the denial the more positive should be the assertion; and the more positive the assertion the more exemplary and beautiful should be the life by which that assertion is repeated and sustained.

Perhaps some kindly soul will intervene and endeavour to reconcile God in this matter, but such a suggestion is anticipated and repudiated. "Yet let no man strive, nor reprove another." By this word the Lord means: This is more than a merely human contention; do not let any man arise and suppose that he can daub this wall effectively or usefully, for he has only untempered mortar at his disposal. This is a divine fight; in this battle it is God against godlessness. The discussion is universal. No man is fit to arbitrate as between the contention of God on the one hand, and the claim of human nature on the other. Human

nature must be silent ; it is human nature in its totality that is impeached. Where shall a mediator be found ? Is there no daysman that may lay his hand upon both, and make a speech that shall represent the actuality of the case and issue in reconciliation and peace, pardon and heaven ? Out of such necessities there arises a cry that if it could explain itself would mean the Cross.

The impeachment does not end here : "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." This representation is cold ; it is not the representation which the prophet made ; there is a word omitted which gives accent and force to this impeachment. We should read, literally, "My people are destroyed for lack of the knowledge." There is only one knowledge worth acquiring. Away with information if it be made to take the place of inspiration. Information is useful within very narrow limits, for information is a changeable quantity—changing by the very fact of enlargement and self-correction ; but inspiration is the spirit, the genius that unites all things, interprets all things, and in a sense governs and directs all things. "My people are destroyed for lack of the knowledge,"—the one knowledge, the only knowledge worth having, the knowledge of God. The Bible is consistent in its claim ; never does it lower its spiritual tone ; not in one instance will it modify the claims and challenges of God. If God be not first, then there can be no settlement of the contention. With God at the right place, all other considerations and ministries and interactions assume their right relation and process. Who has not heard of the man who sold all his possessions that he might buy one with it, called a pearl of great price ? Not that all the others represented in their totality the value of the one ; when the one was obtained it was not merely a transference of value, it was an added treasure, a treasure beyond all price or arithmetical expression of superiority.

So with the knowledge of God. What a fool is he who knows everything but God ! There are men who are so involved in getting scraps and fragments and little pieces of things together that they do not realise the totality of things. A man has a whole sack filled with little pieces of he does not know what, and he does not know what to make of it ; he would be a comparatively happy man if he could part with that sack that is filled

with little bits of things ; he calls them phenomena, and does not get much comfort out of the word. It is possible so to use a microscope as to become its victim. There is a telescope as well as a microscope ; there are stars as well as invisible insects. He who knows God knows the totality of the universe. He may be to a large extent ignorant of details ; he may not have a microscope, he may not have a telescope, but he has that peculiar spiritual faculty which grasps the whole, and hears a solemn music in the march of the whole which is not heard by persons who take the organ to pieces that they may find where the music came from. Who would not give all he has for one sight of the invisible ? Who would not consider all possessions worthless as compared with one face-to-face interview with God ? Compared with that conference how small the debates of men, the collisions of human intellect, the uproar of social conflict and contention. We may belittle the very conception of knowing God. We are called upon to enter into a large conception of that fact, and the larger our conception of what is meant by knowing God, the more important will that knowledge become in actual reality. We do not know God who can only spell his name ; we know nothing of God who have only heard of him ; he only knows God who has lived with him ; we live and move and have our being in God. Even this is insufficient, for there is needed one who can reveal God, in all the fulness of his character and being ; the only Begotten of the Father, who dwelleth in the Father's bosom, he hath revealed him. Only Jesus Christ can tell us what God is. The Hebrew piled its epithets that it might scale the height of the divine abode, but Jesus operated in the other direction ; instead of scaling his way to the unscalable infinite, he proceeded forth and came from God, and when he arrived, we called him God with us, God Incarnate, God the Son, God the Saviour. We need both the actions : we need a Hebrew in its sublimity that can only get to the clouds, and we need that universal language which comes down and speaks to old men and little children, wisest philosopher and unlettered peasant, in a mystery of simplicity that can be understood, but not explained, felt, but not accounted for, so that it shall be true that a man shall know God by his heart when he cannot comprehend him by his intellect.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thine eye is upon us continually ; there is not a word on our tongue, there is not a thought in our heart, but, lo ! O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Oftentimes dost thou cause us to exclaim in wonder, sometimes in terror, sometimes in joy, All things are naked and open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do. The eyes of the Lord run to and fro through the whole earth ; the darkness and the light are both alike unto thee : how then shall we stand before thy judgment seat, in what guise shall we there appear ? Thou dost tear away the clothing of the hypocrite ; thou dost send a fire upon the simulations of men. Enable us always to remember that thine eye is upon us for good, and not for judgment only ; thou shalt guide us with thine eye. The opening of thine eye upon our life shall be as the dawning of the day upon the earth that has long been hidden in darkness. The Lord grant unto us the assurance that his criticism is gracious, and that in judgment he seeks a way for his mercy. The law came by Moses, but grace and truth by Jesus Christ. We live in the Christian light ; we assemble within the shadow of the Cross ; we meet at the altar of propitiation. Jesus Christ loved us and gave himself for us—the just for the unjust, and now thou art able to grant unto us justification through faith and the peace which comes of being right with God. Show us that we are still under law, but under the larger law of love, under the wider judgment of regulated liberty ; and thus may we walk with dignity, steadfastness, patience, humbleness of mind, and all trust of heart, and at the last may we see that thou hast led us by a right way. The mountain was right and the valley, the cold wintry day and the bright summer flowery path, all was right ; it was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes. Amen.

Chapters iv., v.

FORSAKING GOD.

“ My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge : because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me : seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children ” (iv. 6).

THE Lord must in some way find our life that he may either reward it or chastise it. In this case he will get at the parents through the children. He would not have done this if there had been any other way into their rebellious and

obdurate hearts. We must leave him to explain himself in reference to the children; he will do that which is right and merciful; we need not plague ourselves about that aspect of mystery; rather let us fasten attention upon the fact that God means for our good to get at our souls somehow. He will try all the gates, and even if he has to break down the child-gate he will come in. That is the point upon which we are to fix our devout attention. We can of course be tempted in another direction: why attack the children, why conduct himself towards the innocent as if they were guilty? Why punish the innocent for those who have transgressed? So we metaphysically fritter away God's noblest meaning; we endeavour to solve the insoluble, when we might be accepting with grace and gratitude the inevitable, the disciplinary, and the high administration of divine righteousness.

Then he will proceed with his punishment, and "change their glory into shame." He shall make the noblest horse as a mean and stumbling ass; he will cause the genius that set itself against him to do menial work, to sing unworthy songs, to paint pictures for the walls of hell; he will turn their eloquence into a new method of lying; that which was once their crown shall be their disgrace; that which was once their chief glory shall be a cloud upon their lives. God will turn things upside down; he will have night at midday, if thereby he can do good to the sons of men. The lesson is that somehow, at some point, divine judgment will lay hold upon us, that it may prepare the way for divine mercy. Judgment will not come alone if he can help it; judgment is God's strange work. When the fire comes it is only to burn the stubble; when God strikes it is that he may awaken attention; when God takes away the little child it is that we may look up—the look that stirs heaven, the look that means, There must be something beyond; the inexplicable look, the attitude religious, even when the tongue is dumb as to praise. So we recur again and again to the deep sweet true lesson that whatever happens in the way of divine discipline, or in the administration of divine law, is meant not only to rebuke us for sin and judge us with tremendous judgment, but to invite us to thought and prayer, to penitence, and through contrition to pardon.

How vividly the sin of the people represented itself to God. We ought to ask, How do other people view our actions? For we are not judges at all times of our own behaviour. But the question should not end there; that inquiry is itself but a hint of broader criticism. We should ask, How does this life appeal to God? God has a right to be heard upon this subject. It is not for man to say that he is judge, and he knows all, and can settle everything, and that his opinion is final. Even art appeals to criticism; even music seems to say in all its undulation, in all its wizardry of sound: Do you feel this? Does it touch you, heal you, inspire you, have some effect upon you? And man must submit his life to divine criticism; his question should be, Lord, this looks well to me, but I can only see it from one point of view; how does it look from heaven? Things are in reality as God sees them, for God sees them in their reality.

“They eat up the sin of my people, and they set their heart on their iniquity.” They live upon it, they pander to people rather than expose their sins, and so long as those sins are profitable the priests seize the produce, and spend it on their own lust, vanity, and ambition. Think of anointed men living on the produce of sin and shame! The people go out and do the sin, and those who are in the sanctuary say, Bring your gains; we will not ask how you got them; only plentifully dispense them to us, and we will ask nothing concerning processes. So the priest was made fat by the iniquity of the people, and the Lord was moved in heaven in the direction of controversy and judgment, and he shook the heaven in his wrath, and condemned those whom he called by the endearing name “My people.” It is something to have a righteous God, whoever invented him. Say these prophets were inventors of a God, it was a noble God they dreamed. His moral character disposes of the theory of invention; it does not lie within the scope of iniquity to dream holiness; it is not within the power of diseased corrupt humanity to invent a spotless God, walking in righteousness, and judging the earth in equity. The Lord inquires about our gains and our produce and our enjoyments, and he will not have upon his altar the result of sin. We are willing to receive it because we are imperfect. A man who has made money by evil practices may

bring it to the Church, and with a kind of Protestant papality we say, The end will sanctify the means ; we will take this blood-money, and build holy walls with it ; we will accept this treasure of shame, and pray it into a kind of purity. The Lord will not have such sacrifice. He loves honesty, truth, righteousness, reality, and he will not close his eyes in connivance when iniquity would seek to bribe the altar. These are the teachings of the Old Testament ; verily those teachings might make it a New Testament every day ; this morality never grows old ; in this ineffable righteousness there is an infinite novelty. Here is the security of the universe, and the security of the Church.

Then we come to words which are often quoted as a proverb : "And there shall be, like people, like priest." The people may have what they like, and the priest will say, "You could not help it." The priest will reproduce what the people are doing, and the people will take encouragement from the priest to go out and do double wickedness, and thus they shall keep the action even. To this degree of corruptness may holiest institutions be dragged. The priest—meaning by that word teacher, preacher, minister, apostle—should always be strong enough to condemn ; he can condemn generally, but not particularly ; he can damn the distant, he must pet and flatter and gratify the near. He will outgrow this—when he knows Christ better ; when he is enabled to complete his faith by feeling that it is not necessary for him to live, but it is necessary for him to speak the truth ; when he comes to the point of feeling that it is not at all needful that he should have a roof over his head, but it is necessary that he should have an approving conscience ; when he completes his theology by this divinest morality, he will be a rare man in the earth, with a great voice thundering its judgments, and with a tender voice uttering its benedictions and solaces where hearts are broken with real contrition. Priests should lead ; priests should not neglect denunciation, even where they are unable to follow their denunciation by examples to the contrary. The word should be spoken boldly, roundly, grandly. It will be a woesome day for the nation when the word is not sounded out in all its simplicity, purity, rigour, and tenderness.

The Lord says, "I will punish them for their ways, and reward them for their doings." When we find this word "doings" in the Old Testament associated with God it means great doings. This is one of those words which is at once both substantive and adjective. "Doings" associated with the divine name is a word meaning great things—marvellous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty—and when the word doings in the old Hebrew is associated with men, it means bold doings, audacity, impudence at its highest height; doings that seek to accomplish by boisterousness and audacity and madness what cannot be accomplished by quietness and wisdom and moral strength. The Lord will crush the impertinence and the folly of sinners.

A wonderful discovery the Lord makes as to the sin of the people; he says, "They sacrifice upon the tops of the mountains, and burn incense upon the hills." That is the bold aspect, that is the public phase; instead of doing all these things, as Ezekiel would say, in a chamber of imagery far down, at which you get through a hole in the wall, they go up to high places, and invite the sun to look upon them; they kiss the calf in public. Some credit should be due to audacity; but there is another sin which cannot be done on the tops of the mountains, so the charge continues—"under oaks and poplars and elms, because the shadow thereof is good." Here is the secret aspect of rebellion. Do not believe that the blusterer lives only in public as fool and criminal; do not say, There is a fine frankness about this man, anyhow; when he sins he sins in high places; he goes upon the mountain and stamps his foot upon the high hills, and the great hill throbs and vibrates under his sturdy step. That is not the whole man; he will seek the oak, the poplar, and the elm, because the shadow thereof is good. It is a broad shadow; it makes night in daytime; it casts such a shadow upon the earth which it covers that it amounts to practical darkness. So the blustering sinner is upon the mountain, trying to perpetrate some trick that shall deserve the commendation of being frank, and when he has achieved that commendation he will seek the shadow that is good, the shadow at daytime, the darkness underneath the noontide sun. How the Lord searches us, and tries our life, and puts his fingers through and through us, that nothing may be hidden from him! He

touches us at every point, and looks through us, and understands us altogether. There is not a word upon our tongue, there is not a thought in our hearts, but lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether; thou knowest our thought afar off; ere it is quite rounded into shapeliness thou dost know it in its plasm, in its earliest hint; before the mind knows its own thinking thou knowest it all, and seest it in overt act, in positive malignant disposition.

So the Lord proceeds with his charge, and in a tone of intolerable mockery and irony he returns to Beth-aven.

"Though thou, Israel, play the harlot, yet let not Judah offend; and come not ye unto Gilgal, neither go ye up to Beth-aven, nor swear, The Lord liveth" (iv. 15).

Beth-aven substitutes Bethel. In the old, old history Bethel meant house of God, and still means that etymologically; but it has so changed its character that no longer is it Bethel, but Beth-aven—house of vanity. Thus the sanctuary may be made a stable; thus the altar may be sold for bread that shall minister to the hunger of wickedness; thus is glory turned into shame: on the temple door is written *Ichabod*—the glory hath departed; the walls are there, let the owls and satyrs find within them what hospitality they can, for the Lord hath gone up with a shout of derision, and Beth-el is Beth-aven. Thus do we lose our character; thus the names in which we are baptised become associated with every form of shame, debasement, and disgrace; thus may sweetest memories be depraved; thus may the wine of love become the sour drink of remorse, disappointment, and alienation. How is the fine gold become dim; how are the lofty brought low; and see swirling yonder in the abyss of space the star that made the morning glad! Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.

"For Israel slideth back as a backsliding heifer: now the Lord will feed them as a lamb in a large place" (iv. 16).

This metaphor is full of suggestion, and full of high philosophy. Israel complained of limitation; Israel was chafed by the yoke, and Israel resented the puncture of the goad. Israel said, "I want liberty, I do not want this moral bondage any longer; I do not want to be surrounded by commandments, I do not want to

live in a cage of ten bars called the ten commandments of God : I want liberty ; let me follow my reason, my instincts, let me obey myself." The Lord said, So be it. "The Lord will feed thee as a lamb in a large place": thou shalt have liberty enough, but it shall be the liberty of a wilderness. You can have liberty, but you will find no garden in it ; if you want the garden you must have the law. Here is a lamb that says, "I want liberty ; I do not want this pasture and this fold, and this shepherdliness ; I want to go where I like." Very good, saith the great Shepherd in heaven, go : you shall have place enough, but it shall be the place of a wilderness. Let us take care how we trifle with law, obligation, responsibility, limitation. When we are tethered down to a centre it means something ; we are tethered for our good. Our brain can only do a certain amount of work : if we want a larger liberty we may take the liberty of insanity. That is open folly. He is the wise man who says, I have but a certain capacity, I have so many talents, I have so much time in which to work : Lord, teach me how to make the best of what thou hast given me to begin the world with ; I will not pine for five talents or ten, thou hast given me two : help me to double them ; I should like to do as large thinking as some other men, and be as brilliant as they are, but I know I never should be what they are in thy great Church and world ; therefore make me contented with what I have, obedient, simple-minded, frank-hearted, always seeking opportunities of doing what little thing or great thing may be in my power. Poor foolish lamb ! it was not content with the home pasture ; it said, There is food enough here, but I want more than food ; the grass is rich and succulent, and green and plentiful, but I want liberty. And the lamb vaulted over the stone wall, or pushed itself through the sheltering hedge, and away it went into the liberty of a stony desert. We still need the commandments, we still need the beatitudes ; we are yet mortal. Blessed is he who knows the number of his days, and who spends them in a spirit of wisdom. Do not seek too much liberty. The moment you pass beyond the appointed boundary you are lost, and only he can find you who is willing to leave the unfallen, that he may seek and save that which is lost. Do not run the risk. The devil is so acute that you may be tempted, even in the wilderness, to think you can

feed your hunger with stones. Consider and be wise, for there may a time come when the Lord will say, "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone;" that is to say, Give him rest; let him get out of his idols what he can; let there be no longer any expostulation, entreaty, beseechment, importunity, care, anxious love, solicitous philanthropy; he is lost, now let him alone. Awful word, tremendous judgment! For God to let us alone is hell.

The Lord is not content with calling one class to judgment; he is universal in his claim. He says, "Hear ye this, O priests;"—that is one class—"and hearken, ye house of Israel;"—that is another class—"and give ye ear, O house of the king;"—that is the greatest dignity. So you have the sacerdotal and the popular and the royal; and the reason is that "judgment is toward" them, "because ye have been a snare on Mizpah and a net spread upon Tabor." The Lord charges them all with having been "profound to make slaughter"—deep in iniquity, wonderful power of scheming in the art of destruction. Men can be clever in wickedness. There is a bungling criminality that any vulgar mind can imitate; but even crime may be carried on to the point of a fine art; the mind takes eagerly with a fine willingness to certain species of sin and evil. If men would turn these great talents which are prostituted in the cause of wickedness to honest ways of obtaining a livelihood, to what eminence they might attain! How is it that the heart loves to be skilled in evil? Is there no meaning in this? Is it a mere chance in the mystery of life, or does it indicate the solemn tremendous fact that we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; there is none righteous, no, not one?

The Lord says, "I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hid from me" (v., ver. 3). In English we do not get the meaning of this fully. The "I" is emphatic. Very seldom in English rhetoric is any emphasis to be laid upon a word like "I"; we should throw the emphasis upon the word "know." "I know Ephraim," and in English that would be equal to what it is in Hebrew, namely, "I, even I, know Ephraim": whether he is

on the hill, or whether he is in the shadow which he considers good, wherever he is, whatever he is doing, my eye is fixed upon him; he does not escape criticism; God's mind is watching judicially everything that the sinner is doing, "Thou God seest me"—not in the sense of thou protectest me, and thou knowest me; but in a critical sense—thou dost penetrate my reins and my heart, my thought and my unconfessed purpose, and it is not in man to find an inviolable solitude.

"They will not frame their doings to turn unto their God: for the spirit of whoredoms is in the midst of them" (v., ver. 4).

They cannot set up any framework of God; they are poor moral carpenters: their fingers lose all skill when they seek to put up something that shall have the appearance at least of morality and goodness. They no sooner set up one side of the edifice than the other falls down, and the framework will not hold together, because the spirit is wrong. Away with your mechanical morality; away with your frameworks of honour and social security, even of education when it is meant as a substitute for moral earnestness and purity. It is the spirit that must be renewed; we do not want a framework, but a genius of heart, an atmosphere of soul, a new manhood—"Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again." Make the tree good, and the fruit will be good. Do not trouble yourselves about the framework. You are not carpenters, you are men; you are not mechanics, you are souls. Do not trifle with the tragedy of life.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we need thy sweet Word evermore. It is not enough to live to-day; we must never cease to live. This is the mystery of life; with all its pain and shadow, its weakness and disappointment, still it clings to itself, it lingers and yearns after immortality. Thy commandment is exceeding broad, but so is thy promise: thy mercy endureth for ever. This is our joy; into this holy place we come from time to time to renew our life, to sing our hymn of praise and thanks, and to take again into the world redoubled and ennobled strength. Thou hast been our God; thou wilt not forsake us; thou wast our father's God, and thou didst never exclude the children from thine overflowing and redundant blessing. When didst thou speak alone to those who were living? Thou didst speak beyond them, to all the ages that should come. Why should the Lord speak twice? Doth not his breath fill infinity? Is not the look of his love the look of eternity? We bless thee, therefore, for thy Word once spoken, once delivered unto the saints, once made clear to the hungry, yearning, agonised heart of man. It is enough, it is finished; the river of God is full of water. Pity us in all our littleness; have mercy upon us in all the aggravation of our sin. We thought of sin like an infinite cloud until we saw the Cross; then understood we the Word. Where sin abounded grace hath much more abounded; heaven is broader than perdition; God is mightier than all his enemies; the throne of the Lord covereth all space and all duration. If we have rendered any service to thee, the praise be thine; if aught has been done to make thy kingdom appear in its truest beauty, the vision was from heaven. We praise thee, therefore, with undivided tribute and eulogy for all thy tender grace, for all thy lovingkindness. Bind us up in the bundle of life; see to it that no man pluck us out of thine hand. May we never perish in sight of land, but be brought safely home, quite home, right into the innermost place of home; there not to change, but to continue and heighten our Christian song. Amen.

Chapter v. 6-15.

DIVINE WITHDRAWAL.

"They shall go with their flocks and with their herds to seek the Lord; but they shall not find him; he hath withdrawn himself from them" (ver. 6).

"WITHDRAWN" is a word that may well chill our heart. It would be enough to express intolerable displeasure if it stood just as it stands in this verse; but a larger meaning belongs to the word. "Withdrawn" is in some senses a negative

relation, but it was a distinctly positive and may we add repelling action which the Lord meant to convey by the use of this term. All words were originally pictures, and the real dictionary when it appears will be pictorial. The Lord in this instance frees himself from them. That is the literal and broader meaning of the prophecy. He releases himself, he detaches himself, he shakes off an encumbrance, a nuisance, a claim that is without righteousness. This may be taken again in two senses. The people are going with flocks and herds as if bent on sacrificial purpose; they will give the Lord any quantity of blood—hot, reeking blood; but the Lord says, I will have no more of your sacrifices; they are an abomination to me; I hate all the programme of ritual and ceremony and attitude, if it fail to express a hunger and a reverence of the heart and mind. So the Lord is seen here in the act of taking up all these flocks and herds, and all these unwilling priests, and freeing himself from them, throwing them away, as men pass out from their custody things that are offensive, worthless, and corrupting. Or it may mean that the Lord shakes himself clear of the clutch of hands that hath no heart in them; he will walk alone. He will not give up his shepherdliness, though he have no flock to follow him. Every woman is mother, every man is father, and a man is not the less father that all his children are twice dead, and are as plants plucked up by the roots, and cast out to the burning. The shepherdliness is not determined by the number of sheep following or going before; shepherdliness is a quality, a disposition, an inspiration, an eternal solicitude. If need be God will continue his shepherdliness though every sheep go astray, and every lamb should die. Mark the disastrous possibility! Men may be left without God; the Almighty and All-merciful may have retired, gone away, away into the shade, the darkness of night; he may have enshrouded himself in a pavilion of thick darkness, where our poor prayers are lost on the outside. To this dreadful issue may things come. Various hath the Lord punished the Church, and punished the lands where his altars ought to have been higher than the forest trees. "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread [the meanest of all famines], nor a thirst for water [a mere lip fire], but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord,"—a thirst that cannot be quenched

by all the springs and fountains of the world. And in this chapter the same process of punishment is continued, and is most remarkable for the variety of its application.

There is a touch of satire in the suggestion that follows. After all this want of fealty and love on the part of the people, the Lord says, "Now shall a month devour them with their portions." The Lord will show, as it were, a visible diminution of the time of the wicked man; that time shall be a month long; the moon shall proclaim this gospel of dissolution. See how the moon waxes, wanes; it is the little month coming up with a kind of buoyancy as if it would last a year, and then suddenly falling back and quietly dying among the clouds. The Lord says, Watch the moon; O thou proud, bloated, blustering Church, watch the moon, that is thy picture: a time of waxing to be followed by a time of waning; a month shall eat thee, a handful of days shall devour thee in forgetfulness. The satire of God is keen, subtle, penetrating; if ever it appeared to be other, it is because the Lord must adopt language which the people whom he seeks to chastise can understand. Wonderful is the visible ministry of God if we had eyes to see it. "Day unto day" speaks of brevity. Whoever imagined that the sunny dawn would die? The dawn is an assured triumph: see how it comes! It comes with the quietness of strength. Weakness may be impetuous, violent, demonstrative, but omnipotence is, by the very necessity of its qualities, calm. The earth stands still because it flies so fast. So strength, because of its completeness, is easy, composed, tranquil. The dawn makes no noise as it rolls back the darkness. The dawn can never die: see how it fills the heavens, how it almost speaks in trumpet tones of triumph that cannot be baffled, enthusiasm that seems to mean benediction, everlasting and immeasurable. This proceeds up to mid-day; then afterwards there is a westering process, and the dawn, caught at the other end of heaven, dies. "And night unto night showeth knowledge"; and even the year, days and nights put together, has its youth, blustering, audacious, defiant; quite a little series of explosions of wind, and deluges of rain, and storms of snow; and then it is summer, and then it is quiet autumn, and autumn, like all the others, lies down and dies. Why not open our eyes to

behold the wondrous lessons that God is writing visibly for us? There are a thousand lessons without voice or sound or sign, which only the soul can read and understand in absolute silence and secrecy. There are also lessons broad as heaven, and bright as the sun, which men might read, and out of which they might make an introductory Bible.

Now the Lord will proceed to tell the offending people what to do:—"Blow ye the cornet in Gibeah." The cornet was always used to give the signal of alarm. It was an instrument of horn; when the strong blower blew his blast through that horn, it meant that the enemy was at the gate; men were called upon to arise, put on their armour, stand erect, watch. "And the trumpet in Ramah." The trumpet was used as a signal for calling to worship; in the midst of the alarm there shall still be a place left for the adoration of God, for the exercise of those religious impulses and aspirations which make us men. Gibeah and Ramah were the weak points; through them the enemy would appear. The enemy already held Israel in savage grip, and through Gibeah and Ramah the enemy would seek the neck of Judah. What is to be done? Sound the cornet, blow the trumpet; be alarmed, and yet not irreligiously; be awakened, roused, but not so as to forget that God reigns and rules, and that the mightiest weapon is not formed of steel. Who can run his impious fingers over the sword of God's lightning? Alarm should never disable the religious faculty; panic should never be greater than the power of prayer; yea, rather when there is panic that can be vindicated by reason, there should be religiousness that can be justified by all that makes us what we are in the sight of God—rational, intelligent, responsible, immortal. We must go to the prophets if we would find what God can do in the way of punishment; there would seem to be no tongue equal to the explanation of chastisement and penalty equal to the Hebrew tongue. It was a tongue that could round a prayer into noblest majesty better than any other, and when it came to deal with penalty, chastisement, the vindication of the divine righteousness, it became an instrument of tremendous power.

"Ephraim shall be desolate in the day of rebuke" (ver. 9).—

“Desolate” may be ranked with energetic adjectives; it was another form of the word that the prophet used; it was a substantive, colder than ice, hollower than the wind: Ephraim shall be a desolation. We have seen already how the prophet used nouns of action in describing the moral condition of the people in the fourth verse. Here we come from the descriptive word into the concrete term—a desolation; a word which carries its own limitations and qualifications. You cannot amend the word, you cannot enlarge it, you can add nothing to its cheerlessness; desolation admits of no companion term; it must be felt to be understood. There have been times when the house was a desolation; there was no light in the windows; though they stood squarely south, and looked right at the sun at mid-day, yet they caught no light; there was silence in the house; no sound; the fire crackled, and spluttered, and spent itself in vain explosions, but there was no poetry in all the way of the flame, there was no picture of home in all the blank shining of the hollow tongues of fire that licked the grate, but said nothing, yet only hinted that the place was empty; bed and cot and favourite fireside, all vacant, and the very grandeur of the house an aggravation of its vacancy. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Why is God so wrathful? Is this an arbitrary vengeance? Doth he delight to show his omnipotence, and to chastise the insects of a day because he is Almighty? Never. There is always a moral reason:—“The princes of Judah were like them that remove the bound.” God has always been jealous of the landmark. God is honest; would his Church were also honest! God will not live in the house until the false weights and scales be taken out of it; God will not tabernacle with men whilst they are pinching the poor of one little inch of the yard length; he will trouble the house with a great moan of wind, until the balances be right; then he will say, You may now pray. And every sentence will be an answer. From the beginning we have seen that God would have the landmark respected. Here are the princes of Judah, thieves. It must be an awful thing to rob the poor as they were robbed by the great in all ages. It must be an infinitely difficult thing for a prince to be honest; it is an

almost impossible thing for a rich man to be really honest. He wants the next field. You have a thousand acres. He says, I know it, but I want a thousand and one, to round the corner, to complete the estate. Your landmark ends here; he replies, I am not quite sure of that. I think it ought to be moved a little to the north. Why will much have more? Why covet the vineyard on the other side of the hedge? Why not let the poor have something? The Lord is the defender of the poor; he will never see the poor man stripped naked without interposing in some way. We cannot understand how, but there is in history, taking it in great breadths, a spirit that reclaims what has been taken unrighteously, that punishes the men who trifle with landmarks and boundaries and old family fences. God rebukes the rich; God never blesses human greediness. It seems to flourish, and the rich man appears to have simply to reach out his hand to put another estate in his pocket. Judge not by appearances, or by narrow instances; take in cycles of time, great spans of history, and see how the slow-moving, but sure-moving, spirit of Providence readjusts and reclaims, and finally establishes according to the law of honesty and righteousness.

How will God proceed in his punishment of Ephraim and of Judah? He will proceed variously:—"Therefore will I be unto Ephraim as a moth." The figure is not too humble to be adopted by the divine action for purposes of illustration. The moth works secretly, silently; you never hear its motions in the fabric which it is slowly consuming. God works thus amongst the children of men. We say from the human side: He is not the man he was; once he would not have made that mistake. How different he is now from what he was ten years ago; now he forgets, he mislays things, he mixes the succession of affairs; he is not marked now by the sharp punctuality, the honest punctuality which characterised him aforetime; he tells the same story twice over. What has taken place? Thus we remark from the outside; the Lord is as a moth within his brain. "And to the house of Judah as rottenness": a gradual process of decomposition; not coming to maturity all at once. Some men are, as to their intellect, and their spiritual qualities, and their moral attributes, visibly rotting before our eyes. You note the lowering of

the moral tone ; you observe how the bloom is removed from the fair peach. Where are the commandments now ; where the lofty conception of human right and divine rule now ? Is there any spectacle more revolting than that of a putrefying character ? Hence the pestilence that fills the very air with death.

These are God's silent actions ; but he proceeds to say, "I will be unto Ephraim as a lion, and as a young lion to the house of Judah." How he changes ! How all things are possible to God ! The moth is now a lion ; the process of decay is now exchanged for the roaring and the fierceness of a young lion in the agony of its hunger. Thus various is the providence of God—retributive, instructive, comforting, desolating. The Lord rideth forth in twenty thousand chariots, and none can tell in what chariot he will come forth at his next appearance.

This contrastive image of penalty is beautifully given in an intermediate verse :—"When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wound." There you have precisely the parallel in each case—the sickness internal, the wound an outward bruise, a gash in the flesh. Who can tell the sickness of the heart ? But who can miss the gaping gash in the bleeding body ? One man is punished with sickness ; another is wounded, so that the poor wound opens and the red blood leaps out in torrents. Both the punishments are from God. Does the matter end at this point ? Could the almighty, all-loving God so punctuate his history of the administration of the affairs of the world as to leave at this point ? It is impossible. The prophet will add a line :—

"I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face : in their affliction they will seek me early " (ver. 15).

God cannot say farewell until he is driven to it ; and who can drive ?—not omnipotence of the arm—hateful power !—but omnipotence of the heart, which, when controlling the omnipotence of the arm, makes both a merciful almightiness. "Till they acknowledge their offence." If we deny our sin God will search us and try us and punish us ; but if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, we do not deceive God. "And seek my face." We have not to wait for the New Testament to find this beautiful

word. We think when we come into the revelation of St. John the Divine, and read that his servants shall see his face, that we have come to some consummating promise. Rightly read, the Old Testament has been full of the face of God. He wants his children to see his face ; not to hear him behind the clouds, but to see him eye to eye ; and Moses conversed with the Lord, literally, mouth to mouth, and, as we have seen, God kissed Moses into heaven. "In their affliction they will seek me early." The literal rendering would be : In their affliction they will seek me in the morning ; they will rise as men who have much work to do that day. In a sweet little favourite poem we hear a child say, "Wake me early, mother, dear." Why wake you early ? The child knew, and told her mother ; the night was too long for that child, for she had "to be Queen of the May," and she must be up with the sun, and before the lark. In their affliction they will hardly be able to sleep during the night. They will watch for the first white in the east ; any hint of morning, and up they will spring, saying, The day will be all too short for us ; we must begin this work early. We have a long prayer to make, a great confession to submit ; is the sun rising—is there any hint of his rising, is there one gleam in the far east ? O watchman, what of the night ? He says, The morning cometh. Then shall all contrite souls spring to their orisons, hasten up for their matins, and before the light is fully abroad the prayer will be quite in heaven.

Thus the grand old Bible rolls like a majestic river through our human history. Let us hasten to it, and drink abundantly of its waters ; they refresh and purify, and quench the soul's burning. Can any man find Jesus in Hosea ? Jesus is in full presence in all this Book of Hosea. Why ? Because he is in the prophet himself. The prophet speaks from the Christ-point. The prophet was himself a crucified man ; in our next reading we shall find that the prophet declared the resurrection. Talk of importing meanings into the Bible ? It is impossible, if those meanings be moral, just, redeeming, ennobling. This is the glory of the tree of life, that it bears all manner of fruits. Make it a large Bible, a great earth-covering Bible ; make it a Bible that fills infinity, eternity ; for one word of God must be greater than anything God has ever made. His thought is his deity.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we know thee by our love; thou dost come to us through our hearts; we feel thy presence; we know thy nearness because of the new warmth that is within us, so that when thy Word closes for a moment we say, Our hearts burned within us. We did not know the Speaker personally, but we knew him sympathetically. There is no voice like thine; as for thy Word, it abideth for ever—in winter and in summer; the night cannot frighten it away by its loads of darkness, and it stands in the sun like the angel of thy presence. Thy Word is a light, a lamp, a song, a fortress; if now and again it be as a sharp sword amongst our bones, behold this judgment is intended for our purification and our progress; but thy Word is full of gospel, good news, glad tidings, music from the heart of God: may we understand it as such, and receive it, and give it the hospitality of our whole heart. Herein is love; herein is health; herein is immortality. All this we know in Christ Jesus thy Son; but for him we should be in darkness, but having Christ we see the light, we are children of the day, and we behold the inviting destiny of heaven; and because it lures us by all its light and joy, we would accept the discipline of the present toil, and act faithfully and lovingly towards our fellow men. May our Christianity be vindicated by our morality; may all that is noble in our thought embody itself in all that is generous in action. Then shall we be the children of Christ, redeemed ones, bearing the blood-mark, carrying the signature eternal; then we shall love the light and the truth and the ways of righteousness, and as for our latter end, it shall be the opening of our truest life. Regard all men from thy great throne; let thy providence be a ministry of helpfulness to all lives, to all workers, sufferers, travellers, strangers. Make the strange land a home; show where the garden grows even in the wilderness, and when thy loved ones are athirst lead them to secret fountains. On the old man and the little child let the sunlight of thy love fall in impartial fulness, and may all men know thy nearness by beholding the goodness which enriches their life. Establish us in the faith; when we want to do wrong send a sudden cloud upon us that shall make us forget our evil purpose; when we want to pray come and be thyself the Altar and the Sovereign; and when we think of our sin lead us to the Cross, whence no faithful soul ever brought his sin back again. The blood of Jesus Christ thy Son cleanseth from all sin. At the Cross we leave it, and there it shall never be found any more; for is not the miracle of thy love the forgetfulness of our sin? Amen.

Chapter vi. 1-3.

“Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight.

Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth."

HEALING AND BINDING.

MAN never uttered these words. They seem as if they had originated in the hearts of the sinners whose sin has been portrayed with unutterable blackness. If we suppose that the prodigals invented this desire and this prayer, we are mistaken. God first teaches the prayer, and then answers it. The proof that prayer is divinely answered is that prayer is divinely taught. Lord, teach us how to pray! God will not disappoint himself; the Lord will not mock his own Throne; the Lord will not teach his children to praise and pray, to give thanks and make request, and then treat them as if they had been speaking into the empty clouds. We often pray without praying, and then we have no answer—thank God! If God treated human folly as he treats divine inspiration, where were his discrimination, his omniscience, his Godhead? Sometimes we pray when we have no right to pray, no claim upon the divine attention; our ambition speaks, our vanity importunes, our selfishness utters its greedy plea; then God is absent; he is not to be found by the cry of selfishness. We are to understand by these words that the Lord himself is teaching the people what to say.

The picture is vivid; it represents the Almighty as telling Israel and Judah and all sinning ones in all ages to say, "Come, let us return." Such an exhortation must have come from God. We have been with Judah and Israel in their hell; it was with difficulty we breathed there; never was sin so held up before us in blackness and pestilence; never did wickedness reek out with so horrible a stench as we have just known it. It took some courage to go through these five chapters; we would have evaded them if we could, but we had to take them as they came. To read some of the verses aloud was an impossibility; we glanced at them, hinted at them, treated them furtively, but as to making their acquaintance in any sense of familiarity, it would be like hugging the very spirit of darkness and pollution. When we have been travelling in some dark and difficult place, filled with smoke and sulphur, when we have come out of the subterranean way, and stood on the thoroughfare, we have exclaimed spontaneously, How

different, how healthy, how fresh the air is! So with us in reference to this opening. After what we have gone through we feel as if we had come suddenly upon a mountain-top, and all the winds were blowing around us, not in violence, but in blessing, every breath a benediction, every breeze a renewal of youth and hope and thankfulness. The great prayers of the Bible are not men's prayers. Solomon never prayed that great dedication prayer out of his own head, until he had taken that head to have it sanctified, refined, ennobled, and enriched by special communion with the Father of all true sanctuaries; and when the prodigal said, far away, "I will arise," it was the Spirit eternal that told him what a fool he was, as well as criminal, to be dying of hunger when he might be eating bread in his father's house. Do not take credit for your own religion. You will spoil it by claiming it. Say rather, when the soul takes wing and seeks the gate of the morning, This also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, wonderful in counsel and excellent in working. Never invent your own prayers; simply have nothing to do with them but utter them, with lips of faith and hearts of thankfulness. No man should ever make a prayer—in any sense construct and arrange a prayer—if he wants it answered; he should first say, Lord, I want to pray; now pray in me, and through me, and for me: and the prayer itself shall be its own reply.

Notice the plural form: "Come, and let us——" This is not a grammatical accident. Here is the expression of a great movement that is yet to take place in human history. Whole nations are to be fired with a religious enthusiasm; man is to speak to man and of man as to himself and of himself; the parts are to come together and constitute the totality of the divine idea. A beautiful sight to see a lone pilgrim going on a journey Godward; vivid pictorially and most subduing pathetically is it to see a prodigal lamed, bruised, travel-stained, a face a pictured sorrow, going alone to tell his Father all his sin. Never let us undervalue individuality of contrition, repentance, and pardon; but what is beautiful in the individual is multiplied in its loveliness when we consider that all men with one voice may some day say to one another, "Come, let us . . ." Can men hide themselves under a common plural? Is there a grammar which belongs to us all,—a

moral grammar, a spiritual syntax? Have all men fallen? Have all we like sheep gone astray? Is there none righteous, no not one? This is the plurality of the return; this is the evidence of the common action, that men start from the abyss of a common apostasy, and by the grace and light of Christ and God the Holy Spirit they may seek pardon, peace, truest comfort.

Notice also the word which we are so apt to pass over as a common phrase, namely, the word "return." We may so pronounce it as to find nothing in it but a dissyllable; we may, on the other hand, be so arrested by all its pathetic suggestiveness as to find in it the history of all sin, and the dawning of the everlasting Gospel. How far is it back to God from the sinner's way-going, his wantonness, and his conscious distance from the Eternal Throne? Can we walk back in a day? Say ye who measure distances and talk numbers, how far is it, how long the journey? Can I accomplish it before the sunset? Foolish man! that he should measure some road his feet may take, and never measure or attempt to measure the distance which intervenes between a soul all sin and a God all holiness. Is this a return to be accomplished airily, jauntily, frivolously? Can it be done in a friendly conversation? Is this a matter to be accomplished by a waving of the hand? Can men go this journey, and yet be sitting still all the time? What is the distance? He would be a foolish king who went forth to battle, and did not number his army, count the cost, and beforehand work out the problem of possibilities. How insane the man who never assures himself how far he is from his father's house! The word "repent" is a larger word than it sometimes appears to be; it involves heart-ache, and heart-inquest, heart-searching, confession, supplication, contrition, shamefacedness, burning of the skin because the heated blood is aflush with the agony of shame. We cannot repent trivially. Earthquakes and tempests, rending winds and burning fires, and pulverising hammers, must all be known in their moral meaning before we enter into rest. This experience will come variously. The dear young child that has never known the vulgarity of sin cannot pass through the same experience as a man who has been familiar with every spirit of it. Yet as to moral meaning and spiritual intent and force, there will be a

kindred consciousness, so that the one shall not talk to the other in an unknown tongue. Even when the child hears the criminal's experience, there will be a power of following it with some degree of sympathy and understanding ; yet while the young soul shudders at the tale of iniquity and wrong and madness, it will still know that such a tale is no romance, but something that might have taken place in the youngest, tenderest heart.

Observe that the meaning is not given in the next form of the expression :—"For he hath torn, and he will heal us ; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up." This God is a surgeon. There is meaning in all the smiting of God ; in all the losses and crosses which baffle our life ; in all the emptying from vessel to vessel which our experience undergoes ; in all the depletions, disappointments, and harassings of the life. God is doing therein a preparatory work ; when he rips up the soil, laying back the greensward as by a hand of iron, it is that he may afterwards come and sow the seed that shall grow into an abundant and satisfying harvest. When the surgeon brings his steel into the sick chamber, it is not that he may cut, wound, and give pain ; he cuts and wounds and gives pain and tears to pieces that he may heal and comfort and restore. Look at the purpose of the smiting ; look at the meaning of the tearing which our life undergoes. Job, if the Lord hath torn thy nest out of thy favourite branch, it is that he may build thee a better, and bigger, and warmer with his own hands. Cheer thee ! All this means that we accept the providence in a filial spirit. The great administration is not carried on without our consent wherever personal culture, refinement, and perfecting of character may be concerned. Herein we are co-workers with God, fellow-labourers with the divine, saying, All things work together for good to them that love God ; then shall the tearing and the smiting end in healing and in binding up.

The second verse is the most mysterious in all the prophecy. Perhaps it is hardly second to any other verse in the whole volume in spiritual mystery :—

"After two days will he revive us : in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight" (ver. 2).'

What is the prophet talking about ? He does not know. No prophet knows his own prophecy. If the prophet knew what he

was talking about he would be as a common man ; his madness is the seal of his apostleship. When Paul became from the world's point of view insane he most tenderly gripped the hand that saved him. We have instances again and again in which men talk not knowing what they are saying ; they use beautiful language and cannot explain it. "And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. And this spake he not of himself ; but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation ; and not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad." Is it possible for a rational man to be talking what he does not understand ? It is one of the raptures and luxuries of the highest life. Arithmetic always knows what it is talking about. Poor arithmetic ! Well called by some prophet, who did not know what he was talking about, "simple arithmetic." It knows every button it holds. You cannot escape the claim of arithmetic. It boasts itself of what it calls its audit and its balance-sheet. But poetry, passion, religious enthusiasm, that momentary transport of the soul in which we see more than can be seen with mortal eyes, that strange power, will, uncontrollable, yet always limited by the highest reason, cannot accept language but with a sense of its insufficiency, and cannot commend it, because of conscious contempt.

There have not been wanting those who have seen the resurrection of our Lord predicted in these words. With them I heartily join. Sometimes words have to lie for centuries because the explanation has not come. The prophets often wondered what they were saying ; they did not know what the spirit of Christ and the spirit of prophecy within them was saying at any given moment ; they wondered, they were alarmed ; their very faces indicated the torment of their soul ; they called the word they spoke a burden—"the burden of the Lord." There are those who tell us that we import meanings into the Bible. We reply : You import meanings into us, and we do not accept you as our teachers, and we despise you as our critics. And there are

those who seem to know exactly what the Bible means and what it cannot mean, and who are very particular not to allow anybody to tell Ezekiel something that Ezekiel never thought about himself. Who knows what a prophecy means? Who understands the higher typology of Scripture? Because there is a spiritualisation of the letter which is superstitious and absurd, it does not follow that there is not a reading of all the apocalypse of the Bible which does not cover all history, all evolution, all sacrifice, and all heroism. Better find more meanings in the Bible than fewer; better say, "It is impossible to drain this goblet," than to treat it as if it were only one of a thousand others to be tasted and rejected as taste may dictate. This is a remarkable expression about the "two days" and "the third day." But is there not here a use of the plural also?—"will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us." Certainly; nor does that interfere with the meaning which has been assigned to the prophecy. It is Christ that is raised, but only as the first-fruits; when Christ rises no saint sleeps. Christ involves the whole, and expresses himself in the totality of the saints. They that sleep in Christ shall only be behind their Lord; they will go up with him as in a cloud of mystery and of glory. "I am the resurrection and the life": does the declaration end there? Does it not go on to say, "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live"? Is the old thunder "come forth" nothing now but a hollow and impotent whisper? Is not Jesus Christ the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever? If ye then be risen with Christ, prove your resurrection by your consecration.

What is the blessed assurance that is given after the resurrection?—"We shall live in his sight": literally, We shall live in his face. The prophet Hosea refers repeatedly to "the face of God." We have just heard what he said, charged by the divine Word: "In their affliction they will seek me early," and we have heard him declare that when they came the Lord would show them his face in answer to their contrition. "We shall be satisfied when we awake,"—that is to say, we shall be satisfied in our resurrection—"with the likeness," or the face, "of God." We are not called into nothingness, emptiness,

vacuity, or a mere sense of largeness and infinity ; we are called to definiteness of conception, singularity and high accentuation of consciousness. We are to fix our gaze upon the ineffable beauty, and by looking at Christ we are to become like him. "For we shall see him as he is": some sights are transfiguring ; there are some objects we could not look at, and then go away instantly and commit sin. We must put a separation between the sight and the sin: we must, in other words, forget the spectacle before we can accept the drudgery of iniquity. To these exaltations are we called ; these are the voices of history and of Providence that address us.

"Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord": there must be no sitting down by the wayside, no loitering, no laziness in all the school of the Church. "We shall know, if we follow on to know": if we practise the little we do know we shall get outlook of things that lie beyond, and confidence to deal with them. Love shall beget love ; capacity shall enlarge itself into a still fuller capacity, and practice in prayer should, so to say, end in skill of supplication ; we shall know the way to the throne and the seat of mercy, and come boldly to it as of right, not in ourselves, but invested in us by the grace of God. "His going forth is prepared as the morning"—is established as the morning. It is a great action of law, a great movement settled, regulated, determined from eternity. "And he shall come unto us as the rain," not the occasional shower, not the intermittent baptism of soft water, but "as the latter and former rain unto the earth": if the latter rain came only, there was no harvest ; if the former rain came only, there was no harvest ; the latter and the former rain must both come, each in its own time, and each in its own way, and then the garners were too small for the harvesting. Thus we have law, and thus we have mercy. Here we have philosophy which earthly philosophy has not yet comprehended ; condescension that leaves behind no amazement that it can stoop so low as to touch the furthest away. It is in these mysteries we live ; in these voices we hear the only music we care to listen to. Here is a house in which we would abide for ever.

Chapter viii. 1-4.

THREATENED DESTRUCTION.

"Set the trumpet to thy mouth. He shall come as an eagle against the house of the Lord, because they have transgressed my covenant, and trespassed against my law" (ver. 1).

THE Lord pursues the evil-doers, not in a spirit of vengeance, but in a spirit of expostulation, to be followed by such penalty as the evil deeds have provoked and deserved. When he commands the prophet to set the trumpet to his mouth he regards the prophet in the capacity of a watchman, whose function it was to notify the coming of God amongst the children of men in some form of judgment. Isaiah was commanded in similar terms—"Cry aloud, spare not; lift up thy voice like a trumpet." The trumpet called men to war, or alarmed them in periods of danger, or summoned them to concerted action on signal occasions. We are not to look upon the office of watchman as extinct. The term may indeed be applied to all trustworthy and vigilant leaders of society; we look to them to tell us the signs of the times, and to give us the signal either for flight or battle. When ministers of religion keep silent in the presence of social dangers or public calamities, they are not to be flattered as if they were exercising a wise prudence; they are to be condemned as unfaithful watchmen who consult their own interests rather than seek to defend and consolidate the welfare of the community. There is a great temptation to be silent in the presence of the wicked, for oftentimes the wealth of this world is in the hands of ungodly men, or it lies in their power to inflict great injury upon those who oppose their malignant will. It is under such circumstances that ministers of Christ are to show their intelligence, their fortitude, and their self-control. On the other hand, it must be borne in mind that neither political nor religious ministers are to unduly excite themselves about trivial subjects, or expend their strength in the consummation of

frivolous purposes. There is a sad lack of proportion in any method or economy which expends energy upon objects unworthy of much consideration.

In the case before us it is the house of God that is in peril; strictly speaking, "the house of the Lord" relates to the Temple, because in that place the Lord had been pleased to record his name. We find it pointed out, however, with clearness that the expression "the house of the Lord" is not confined to what we understand by the word temple or sanctuary: for example, in Jeremiah xii. 7 the Lord says, "I have forsaken mine house, I have left mine heritage; I have given the dearly beloved of my soul into the hand of her enemies;" and in Jeremiah xi. 15 we read, "What hath my beloved to do in mine house, seeing she hath wrought lewdness with many?" In these instances by the "house" of the Lord we are to understand the kingdom of Judah and Jerusalem. The title "God's house" should be preserved through all generations as peculiarly distinctive of the sanctuary; it is a larger and older title than the term "temple." In describing all his own people the Lord says, "My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house"; by "all mine house" we are to understand the whole Church of God, the whole Israel of the Most High. Even when the ten tribes had no longer any portion in strictly temple worship, when, indeed, they had fallen into a base apostasy, God did not regard them as absolutely detached from his house, for he says, "For the wickedness of their doings I will drive them out of mine house."

The image by which the prophet represents the oncoming vengeance of God is most energetic and vivid—"as an eagle against the house of the Lord." Primarily the eagle typifies the destructive irruption of Shalmaneser, who came down furiously and bore away in mocking triumph the ten tribes. The "eagle" includes also Nebuchadnezzar, and, according to some interpreters, it includes the Roman eagle, the ensign of Roman arms. Whatever be the local and particular references as to the eagle, the great principle remains from age to age that God comes to judgment in various forms, always definitely, and, as we shall see, always intelligibly, not only inflicting vengeance as a

sovereign whose covenants have been outraged, but condescending to explain the reasons upon which his most destructive judgments are based. Thus we read, "Because they have transgressed my covenant, and trespassed against my law": the covenant had been broken by idolatry, and the law had been violated by social sins. It is needful to mark this distinction with great particularity, because it shows the breadth of the divine commandment. God is not speaking about a merely metaphysical law—a law which can only be interpreted by the greatest minds, and put into operation on the sublimest occasions of life; he is speaking about a law which had indeed its lofty religious aspects, but which had also its social, practical, tender phases, in whose preservation every man, woman, and child in the kingdom ought to be interested.

It is important also to remember that God's law is always man's defence. We are not dealing with an Oriental prince who has made laws for his own preservation, but with a divine Father who never makes a law that has not a distinctly human aspect, and that is not enriched with a distinct redemptive purpose towards the human family. We might suppose that sin was a metaphysical mystery; something, indeed, for which the sinner himself was hardly responsible, because he did not know either the beginning or the end of his action. God, however, has made it clear that sin is always a crime; that is to say, not only a metaphysical offence, but a practical outrage, or a practical loss. Whoever sins against God sins against his own soul, and not only sins against his soul considered as a metaphysical entity, but sins against himself as a person who is environed and governed by beneficent laws. Once let those laws be violated, and the man does not only suffer metaphysically, or go down in some practical quantity or quality, but he actually suffers in body and estate, sometimes apparently, and always really.

"Israel shall cry unto me, My God, we know thee" (ver. 2).

The Hebrew has been put thus: To me shall they cry, We know thee; we, Israel, thy people, know thee. A parallel passage may be found in the gospel of Matthew, "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name

done many wonderful works?" Israel always claimed to know God, and they were always rebuked for not really knowing him, but knowing him only in name or pretence or worthless vision. Our Lord was encountered by the declaration on the part of the Jews, "He is our God"; but instead of accepting that testimony Jesus Christ appealed to the moral condition and recollection of the pretenders—"It is my Father that honoureth me; of whom ye say, that he is your God. Ye have not known him:" here we have a common sophism exposed and denounced; here is profession of the most positive and blatant kind condemned as an expression of ignorance, and of something worse than mere intellectual ignorance. Israel professed that God had been accepted as the God of the individual and the nation, and yet Jesus Christ charges Israel with not knowing the God professedly so accepted. The charge applies to all religious profession. Do we understand the meaning of our own profession? Do we comprehend the full purpose of all the religious terms we use? When we recite a creed do we really pronounce a vital faith? This discrepancy between a set of formal words and the real meaning of the heart is the region in which temptation operates with deadliest effect. Everywhere Jesus Christ calls for reality: he will not have any of his people say more than they really believe. Even if part of a faith is spoken with energy, and the other part is spoken with some doubtfulness of tone, he would rather accept such a confession because of its reality, than he would receive a confession fluently uttered that did not rise from the innermost convictions of the heart. Always there has been a difficulty as between the utterance of the lip and the meaning of the soul. For example, in Isaiah we read, "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." This process of hypocrisy still goes on. The creed is read in as loud a voice as ever, but there is no soul in the tone of the reader. God will not be honoured by dead letters, he will not receive literary worship; he looks for the spiritual worshipper, and not for the mechanical form. Here is a test to which every soul may subject itself,—here, indeed, is the throne of judgment before which every man may try the reality of his own religious beliefs and utterances.

"Israel hath cast off the thing that is good : the enemy shall pursue him" (ver. 3).

The word "cast off" does not imply a merely mechanical or even intellectual action ; that term is deeply tinged with moral significance, literally meaning, "to cast off with abhorrence." Israel not only cast off God, but abhorred all things good,—him who is good, and the thing which is good ; for the word here employed includes both the person and the object. When a man rejects God he rejects all things good. He may not know it, he may even deny it ; but he must be brought by consideration or by experience to know that to cast off the Fountain is to cast away the stream ; to shut out the sun is to shut out the light ; to forsake God is to accept the sovereignty of evil and darkness. What is the consequence of such off-casting ? The consequence is stated in plain terms—"the enemy shall pursue him." The local reference is to the Assyrian, but the general reference is to the spirit of the law, the spirit that has been turned into an enemy by evil behaviour. "The way of transgressors is hard." "Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished." "Be sure your sin will find you out." "Whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him." The Bible is full of the revelation of this doctrine. We are not to consider the doctrine as one of mere retaliation, but as one of natural and inevitable consequence. The punishment which follows sin is a proof of the goodness of the law which would guard men against it. Fearful are the consequences which flow from sin, even in the sense of deprivation. Were there no definite or positive punishment inflicted on account of sin, yet the deprivation of blessing which follows the downfall of the soul would itself be overwhelming. No longer does the soul see light, or hear music, or respond to love, or enter into sympathy with the spirit of progress ; doors are shut, lights are extinguished, voices are silent ; all that made life a joy and a triumph, a victory and a hope, is taken away, and the sinning soul sits down in darkness, in sackcloth and ashes, mourning an irreparable, an infinite loss.

"They have set up kings, but not by me : they have made princes, and I knew it not : of their silver and their gold have they made them idols, that they may be cut off" (ver. 4).

The whole history of Israel is a history of protest against man-

made kings. God declared to Jeroboam by the mouth of Ahijah the prophet that he would rend the kingdom out of the hands of Solomon, and give ten tribes to Jeroboam, and would take him, and he should reign according to all that his soul desired, and he should be king over Israel. After the ten tribes had made Jeroboam king, another prophet said to Rehoboam and the two tribes, "Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel; return every man to his house, for this thing is from me." God has thus overruled human institutions, and made them contribute to the extension and authority of his own kingdom. The desire for kings was not a legitimate desire, yet it was granted, and notwithstanding all the evils which have accrued God has used the regal institution for beneficent purposes.

God was never consulted as to the rules of the kingdom constituted by the ten tribes. The ten tribes were indeed atheistic; as for Jeroboam, he no sooner received the kingdom than he set up a rebellion against God. This contest between the human and the divine is not confined to Judah or Israel, or to any section of the tribes: we read in the Acts of the Apostles, "Against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done." A marvellous conjunction of forces this, and yet not without a practical aspect, which our own experience enables us to appreciate. We are not to consider that Deicide was determined upon by the counsel of God, but that it was declared as an outcome or revelation of the human heart. God took no pleasure in the kings of Israel, for they were not from him. With the exception of Jehu and his house, all the kings of Israel may be described as atheistic. The kingdom of Israel lasted 223 years, eighteen kings reigned over it, representing ten different families, and it is on record that no family came to a close except by a violent death. Locally, this is all past and gone, but spiritually the whole action is alive to-day. "The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous." "If any man love God, the same is known of him." "Then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

Chapter viii. 5-14.

THE CALF OF SAMARIA.

"Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast thee off; mine anger is kindled against them: how long will it be ere they attain to innocency?" (ver. 5).

THE history of this calf is recorded in the early books of Scripture, and is referred to again and again in the course of the revelation. "They made a calf in Horeb, and worshipped the molten image"; "The king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And he set the one in Beth-el, and the other put he in Dan." As Israel had cast off God, or good, in abhorrence, so the calf had cast off Israel as a thing that was detested. So it must be with all the idols made by men's hands. The history of idolatry is a history of failure. We need not go to heathen forms, or pagan ceremonies, or plunge into the darkness of savage life, in order to know what is meant by idolatry, for we ourselves daily practise it; and even in the midst of our spiritual worship there may be a subtle action operating upon the heart, seeking to seduce it into false trust and homage. It is marvellous that men learn so little from the history of their own race; it is still more marvellous that a man seems to learn next to nothing from the development of his own consciousness. We have seen money take wings unto itself and flee away; we have seen attractive forms wither and decay; we have seen the strongest associations of friendship dissolved or turned into positive enmities; we have observed how health is sapped, and how the strongest man but delays for a moment or two the accomplishment of his journey to the tomb; yet we go on worshipping at false altars and soliciting help from false sources, as if there were no history behind us to tell us the truth, to remind us of our errors, and to point the most useful morals. It should be regarded as the simplest truism in philosophy that only he who worships the true God can offer true worship; yet because God is invisible, or supposedly distant from us, we seize

the seen, and the near, and the apparently strong, and offer bribes to things temporal. The heart must be cleansed of all this false trust, and be led in simple, humble, childlike trustfulness to cast itself upon the living God, caring only for pureness, and leaving all consequences in the hands of him who is the righteous Judge, and who never can confound the good with the bad.

When God speaks of his anger being kindled against sinners, he condescends to use a human form of speech, that he may make his meaning the more clear. God is not the victim of his passions; he simply adopts human forms that he may penetrate into our human understanding, and give men some faint conception at least of his spirit and attitude towards all things evil. Society must punish the evil-doer. Society does not become angry in the sense in which an individual may become passionate; yet society must burn with a holy indignation if it would rightly treat the practice of evil. The dignity of the divine anger is guaranteed by the dignity of the divine nature. It is not an ebullition of passion; it is the expression of an eternal and sensitive righteousness. The Lord asks a remarkable question at the conclusion of this verse, "How long will it be ere they attain to innocency?" The expression is elliptical. We are accustomed to such expressions in the Bible; for example: "Him that hath an high look, and a proud heart, I cannot"—we can easily perceive what word should be filled in here: the Hebrew reads literally "I cannot," we ourselves supply the word "suffer." Again, "New moons and sabbaths, I cannot"—that is all the Hebrew says, but in saying so little it seems to say more than if the sentence had been rhetorically rounded; it is as if the speaker had turned away in an attitude of deprecation with an expression of abhorrence upon his face and in his whole posture, leaving his meaning to be put into formal words by those who saw his action and heard his tone. The meaning of the question would seem to be this: What madness on the part of these people, that, though I create for them a place of repentance, although I make a standing-ground for them before me, they will not endure to return to health of soul; they reject not only a law, but a gospel; not only an ordinance, but a Cross; not only obedience, but pardon. This is one of the mysteries of the moral

nature of man. As an intellectual proposition it is incredible; if it had not been proved by human experience it would have been scouted by human speculation.

"For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind: it hath no stalk: the bud shall yield no meal: if so be it yield, the strangers shall swallow it up" (ver. 7).

This was proved by the whole history of the people. The calf of Samaria was broken to pieces. There were indeed two calves, but as they represented one and the same thing they were called as one—the calf, not the calves; the calf once worshipped was broken in pieces, and was treated as so many chips or fragments for the purpose of kindling a fire. We say we shall reap what we have sown; but we must not omit from the reaping the element of increase. We reap, it may be, of the quality which we have sown, but we certainly reap with an awful increase. Men who sow the wind do not only reap the wind, they reap the whirlwind,—literally, a mighty whirlwind. Nor do they garner the whirlwind as men might garner a crop; the whirlwind is not theirs, they rather themselves belong to the whirlwind, they are blown away by it, they are as chaff before its violence, when they cry their voice is not heard, because of the answering tempest; when they put forth their hands in prayer they are carried away violently as those who have no helper. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." The apostle, even in this passage, does not omit the element of increase, for he adds, "He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption"—that is to say, he shall not only reap flesh, body, or dust, he shall reap each and all of them in its vilest form. There is a tone of contempt in the description which is given in this verse, "It hath no stalk;" although it looked well, yet there was no column of strength, there was nothing abiding; much was promised, but nothing came of all the promise; the seed should not send forth the corn with the ear; there should be no meal, there should be no satisfaction of hunger. The whole process is thus one of failure, disappointment, and mockery. The sinner is going to have a great harvest, and behold when he puts forth his sickle to reap he cuts down but handfuls of darkness! The sinner says he will make a universe of his own; he will construct it on his own pattern; he will govern

it by his own laws; he will fill it with his own spirit; he will turn it to his own account; and behold the boaster is overthrown, and he lies down in humiliation and shame at the feet of the living God whose sovereignty he denied. All this is true, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding. "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found." "The arms of the wicked shall be broken: but the Lord upholdeth the righteous." "The triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment." Alas, all these great truths are proclaimed until they become so familiar as to lose much of their spiritual emphasis and accent. We are accustomed to this judicial thunder. For a time it would appear as if the enemy of souls were stronger than the Redeemer, for though we know the right we pursue the wrong, and although we confess in theological terms our errors, our sins, our shortcomings, and all our infirmities, we yet take our lives into our own hands as if we were invested with omnipotence.

"Because Ephraim hath made many altars to sin, altars shall be unto him to sin" (ver. 11).

The Lord will not permit the plural form of any word which he has consecrated. The word "altar" is right, but the word "altars" is wrong. The word "temple" is permitted, but when Israel buildeth "temples" he offends against God. Ephraim became busily religious. It was not enough for Ephraim to have an altar; he must have an altar everywhere! Thus his very religion became irreligious. His piety became practical atheism. Ephraim tried to do what men are in every age attempting—to make up for the complete, solemn, grand, overwhelming idea of God by the creation of an endless number of petty and distracting details; hence we have creeds, standards, dogmas, forms, tests of orthodoxy, and other altars innumerable and unnameable. We should not pluralise God's singularity. We must not attempt to complicate that which God has made strikingly simple; so simple that a child-mind can approach it and comprehend it. The altars which Ephraim built were to be unto him as occasions of sin. Where Ephraim meant to pray he was to find a new temptation created by his own evil genius. We are led astray

by our own craftiness. Our theological wisdom often becomes the means of our practical impiety. We turn religion into a scheme, a plan, a philosophy, something which human genius can create, invent, administer, overrule, patronise, and thus we drag down an idea which ought to be infinitely transcendent within the limits of our own understanding, and within the influence of our own humiliating patronage. The time will come when men will be ashamed of their formal mechanism and creeds which they intended to be as altars and final tests of religious correctness. Let us beware of our inventions, for they come out of a heart that is not right; let us beware of our formal orthodoxies, for they may be the offspring of a cleverness that is itself perverted. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord; there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism; there is one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus. God always insists upon the singular number; there is only one Name given under heaven amongst men whereby we must be saved; there is one cross, one atonement, one priesthood, one revelation, one baptism of the Eternal Spirit. To split up the unity into diversity, and to find multiplicity in what was intended to be simplicity, is a temptation to which the human heart is constantly exposed; it brings its own stings and pains; it leads to confusion, humiliation, and disgrace.

"I have written to him the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing" (ver. 12).

A very notable word is this word "written." It is everything to have definite law put down in definite expression, and to have it written, so that it can be made matter of immediate and final reference. The term is the more important that the grammar may be so altered as to give the present instead of the perfect tense; then the statement will read, "I write to him the great things of my law." By "great things" understand manifold things; God had written again and again; he had repeated his law in every possible form; it was written in history and psalm, as well as in statute and in precept. The law itself never altered, though the form of its presentation underwent various changes. The words of the law were not as old as Moses; they were in their moral claim no older than the child who at that moment

was listening to them. This is the peculiarity of eternal truth. It is not a time-quantity. It is old, yet new; it is from everlasting, yet it is the marching order of this day. Being the Word of God, it cannot be changed as to its spirit and substance; it can only change verbally or temporarily; the seed is eternal, the blossom and the fruitage may often take upon themselves the climate of the age which is passing over them. Being written, the people could not plead the excuse of ignorance. Apart from a written law, the people might have complained that they had no authoritative moral standard to which to appeal. Hence the use of the Bible. The Bible is full of laws, hints, suggestions, initial views of providence and life; the wise teacher is always able to appeal to the law and to the testimony, not as to mere letters, but as to letters symbolic of all comprehensive and ever-enduring principles. We are not to degrade the Bible into a charm or the emblem of a superstition; we are not to make an idol of its mere letter; our business is to search the Scriptures, penetrate the Scriptures, lay bare the inner meaning of the Scriptures, so that we may find the very mind and heart of God in all their revelations. Nor could the people plead insufficiency, for the commandment of the Lord is exceeding broad. The law was written manifoldly; for it touched upon every point; it covered the whole expanse and need of life; nothing was left to the mere invention of men; even conscience was not called upon to perform any trick or miracle in order to eke out the insufficient law of heaven. All that was necessary for moral inspiration and moral guidance was laid down explicitly in Holy Scripture, then known by the name of law. Seeing that the people could plead neither ignorance nor insufficiency, the interesting question arises, What then did they plead? The answer is given in the latter part of the verse, "They were counted as a strange thing." The meaning here is hardly patent. The people were now to make out that the law had become foreign to them; it was a foreign yoke, a foreign bond, a foreign language. But more than this may be involved. The people regarded the law as a thing outworn—out of keeping with the spirit of the age—well enough for the time and the circumstances. This is precisely the danger to which the Bible is exposed now. It is acknowledged to be a very wonderful book, to contain many amazing and glorious

truths, and indeed to be for the time of its production the marvel of the world. But people resist the idea of its being imposed upon them as a binding law. They say it belonged to another people; it is foreign to them; it is a "strange thing"; they are willing to admire it as a literary wonder, quite a phenomenon, and to give unto it honours due to ancient excellence. But on no account must it now be made a living thing, a living voice, a living law! Those who are under the Gospel profess that they have entered into liberty from the law; that liberty is often a liberty to sin rather than to be more noble and more morally beautiful. Great dangers lie around this line of thinking. God protests that he has not written the Bible as a thing of ancient times, but that he is writing it now, writing it every day, writing it as a direct message to every soul. We lose everything when we lose the modernness of the Bible. It may be perfectly true that man cannot live by rules a thousand years old; but in the case of the Bible the rule is not a day old in any sense that divests it of immediate dignity and claim and pertinence; it is the last utterance of God; the breath with which he uttered it is still warm upon the ear of the listener.

"They sacrifice flesh for the sacrifices of mine offerings, and eat it; but the Lord accepteth them not; now will he remember their iniquity, and visit their sins: they shall return to Egypt" (ver. 13).

The point to be noted here is that the people in offering their sacrifices supposed themselves to be giving gifts unto God. They were the victims of what is now a popular sophism, namely, that worshippers are always giving. The people in the days of Hosea regarded their offerings as so many donations, which showed their liberality; and yet they felt those offerings to be taxations, penalties. They gloried in their sacrifices as if they were conferring some honour or obligation upon God. The Lord on his part denounced them, would not accept them; he remembered the iniquity of those who sacrificed, and visited their sins upon them. What they meant, or should have meant, as a sacrifice, became nothing but mere "flesh" under their impious hands; the sacrifice was not offered in the proper spirit, and therefore it was never transmuted into a holy and acceptable offering. It is the same with our prayers. When we

pray perfunctorily, pray in mere words, pray only formally, as if we were doing a duty which we would gladly escape, then our words, how eloquent soever they may be from a rhetorical point of view, are never sublimated into prayer, and never find their way to heaven; they are words, words only, empty letters, carrying no magnetism of the soul, no fire of the heart, and they fall back upon the listener, not as answers, but as reproaches. The people in the days of the prophets actually ate the flesh which they offered as sacrifices. They thus profited by what appeared to be an act of benevolence, an act of worship, or an act of giving. Here was an instance of making religion an investment, a profitable speculation; giving away with one hand, and taking back with the other. What was the upshot of all this in the days of the prophet? His answer is, "They shall return to Egypt." They were not to return to Egypt again of their own mind; that had been distinctly forbidden by God. But there was a threatening which their souls might have heard to the effect that if they disobeyed the Lord, he would bring them back to Egypt, by the way whereof he spake unto them, Thou shalt see it no more again. Remember that though we may tamper with our religion, may build many altars, and offer sacrifices either in a spirit of grudging, or in a spirit of investment, God's law carries within itself inevitable and appalling penalties.

"For Israel hath forgotten his Maker, and buildeth temples; and Judah hath multiplied fenced cities: but I will send a fire upon his cities, and it shall devour the palaces thereof" (ver. 14).

Israel had not only forgotten the law, but had forgotten the Lawgiver. Israel had not surrendered some highly spiritual or metaphysical religion—had not abandoned some finely-spun and hardly intelligible theory—but had actually forgotten his Maker, and had supposed himself to be made by his own hands. To such abasement may the mind of man come! First the mind surrenders a doctrinal position; then it gives up a practical duty; then it denies a moral obligation; then it dismisses God from the higher ranges of thought; and finally the mind forgets that it ever had a Maker at all! This is the downward path; this is the infinite incline! Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. Men do not generally give up their

religion as a whole, instantly, furiously, and ostentatiously ; little by little it slips from them, a line at a time, a point in a day, but the end of the process is depletion, famine, death. In the use of the word "temples" we come again upon the thought which we found in connection with the word "altars" in the eleventh verse. God had commanded one temple to be built, namely, that at Jerusalem, so that to add to the number of temples were itself a sin. Thus we are brought back to the doctrine that there may be an irreligious religion, an impious piety, a fussy and too energetic devotion that soon brings itself to the level of mere superstition. God charged the sin of idolatry upon Ephraim and the sin of self-confidence upon Judah. All this was done under the pretence of being excessively religious. God will tear away our vain disguises, and show us that in spite of an action that almost rose to the degree of violence we were in heart far away from himself, corrupting the simplicity of his law, and complicating the direct demands of his truth. God is consistent with himself when he says he will send a fire upon the cities that should devour the palaces thereof. Israel and Judah had forgotten their Maker, but God would not forget them. There comes a time in the history of the human soul when nothing but vengeance can be understood. There is an hour in which the Gospel is no Gospel ; its charm is gone because it cannot be appreciated by the deaf ear and the hardened heart ; there is a time when music itself becomes but a knell of judgment. Against all such apostasy we are warned in faithful and tender language, under every possible form of expression, so that if by any means God may reach our souls, and arrest them in their downward career. If we will not listen to love we shall feel the sting of fire. If we will persist in building palaces for ourselves when God has made a house for us, the fire shall leap upon our palaces, and utterly devour all their strength and beauty.

PRAYER.

SAVIOUR of the world, we bless thee for the Cross. We can never understand it, but we can feel its love. We need the Cross; all we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way. There can be but one hope for us, and that hope we find in the Cross of Christ. God forbid that we should trust aught else; God forbid that we should glory in aught else. We are not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; it suits the heart, it meets the agony of the spirit with healing, it saves the soul. We cannot find a light in the midnight of our self-accusation; there is no light in ourselves, there is no light in men, for we are all in one condemnation. There is a Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world; there is a Light above the brightness of the sun upon the Cross; to that Cross we look night and day evermore, and to that Cross no loving heart ever looked in vain. May thy Word be precious to us; always an old word, yet always new; always an eternal thought, always an immediate message. Lord, evermore give us this bread: if a man eat of this bread he shall hunger no more: Lord, in thine house there is bread enough and to spare, why should men perish with hunger? Feed the souls that love thee, and bring back the souls that are far away, that they may fill the vacant places at their Father's table. Pity the poor, the weak, the wandering; pity those who have none to pity them; help the helpless; lead the blind by a way that they know not; and thus in all the providence of the day, and in the history of all time, magnify thyself, thou Son of man, thou Son of God. Amen.

Chapter ix.

THE DEGRADATION OF SIN.

"Rejoice not, O Israel, for joy, as other people: for thou hast gone a whoring from thy God, thou hast loved a reward upon every cornfloor" (ver. 1).

THE footsteps of evil are tracked by the divine eye. Places, how concealed soever from the light and from public recognition, are all searched by his glance, lying nakedly and openly before him, so that he observes the things that were done in secrecy supposed to be inviolable. The picture is striking and painful in its minuteness. Evil has no lodging-place which it can call its own by right of secrecy or solitude. Even perdition itself is searched by the eye of the Almighty. The Psalmist could find

no place of concealment, though he fled away on the wings of the morning; the uttermost parts of the earth were a familiar place, and the depths of the wilderness were as a populous city. It is useful to throw back our memory upon days that are gone, and to track ourselves in the ways of rebellion. We can go back to the flowers which we blighted, to the music which we silenced, to the hopeful looks on child faces that we caused to darken; we can recall voices charged with pathos, and appeals meant for our salvation which we rejected and denied with scoffing and contempt. We are not to look upon a place here and there as a place that has been defiled, but are to connect all the places, to set them as it were in one long dark and humiliating line; every time we look upon that line we shall feel our need of the Cross, because there will come into our hearts a burning shame, which no moral act upon our part can quench or diminish.

What was the consequence of all this divine inquest and criticism? We find that consequence in the words, "Rejoice not, O Israel, for joy, as other people." The word signifies: Do not bound and leap for joy; do not yield to the spirit of exultation, as if you had a right to the noblest rapture. Even the joy, so called, of the vicious man tends in the direction of deeper sorrow. It is as if Hosea had seen the people of Israel at a time of forbidden festivity; they were drunk with wine, they were mad with prosperity, they were exciting one another to more and more exhilaration; the prophet comes before them in that hour of social madness, and forbids the people to rejoice, and gives as a reason for terminating their foolish rapture that they had gone in heart away from God. Israel wished to have the joy of other nations, rather than the joy that was peculiarly and distinctively her own. Israel wished to have kings, festivities, ceremonial enjoyment and honour, like the other nations of the earth; God meant Israel to have an inner joy, a spiritual peace, a rapture of the soul unknown to those who have but superficial conceptions of life and destiny. Israel rejected this divine thought, and wished to rejoice like other nations—to rejoice with pagan joy, and to drown memory with the false excitement of heathen orgies. God thus follows the sinner even into forbidden pleasures, and causes the wine of madness to choke the drunkard in the very

agony of his mirth. God is against the sinner ; if we may so say, he is doubly against the backsliding sinner who, having known the light and heard the law, has turned his back upon the scene, and trampled the covenant under foot.

“The floor and the winepress shall not feed them, and the new wine shall fail in her” (ver. 2).

God having turned away from adulterous Israel takes with him all the blessings which he had bestowed. This is not resentment ; it is in very deed an aspect of mercy with which we ought to be more familiar. The ministry of deprivation is conducted by God upon a beneficent principle, and for a beneficent end. Only weakness threatens ; strength warns, foretells, prophesies the whole flow of consequence and effect. We have repeatedly said that when God told man he would die in the day that he ate of the forbidden tree God did not threaten man, but mercifully and lovingly warned him of the consequences of moral actions. Men may gather their harvests into the very floor of the garner, and store their grapes in the very winepress, so much so that everything shall seem to be safe, and the soul shall appear to have much goods laid up for many years ; but even when the wheat is on the floor, and the grapes are in the press, and the hand is put forth to draw in plentifulness, even then the sword of the Lord shall strike the bad man, and in the midst of bounty he shall stand a pauper, and feel the pain of hunger. The bounties of nature are lost upon the vicious. They have no satisfaction in bread, they have no joy in wine, they have no gladness in song ; all nature is but a radiant blank, an infinite and mocking cipher.

“They shall not dwell in the Lord’s land ; but Ephraim shall return to Egypt, and they shall eat unclean things in Assyria” (ver. 3).

Notice the last part of this verse as containing what may be called the sting of divine judgment. Here we have the degradation of sin. To be ceremonially clean or pure was the joy and pride of Israel. The Jews would not eat things that were common or unclean, and by this mark they were distinguished from other people. Whilst Israel lived even in nominal piety, how superficial soever it might be, God gave him protection against degradation ; but when Israel turned away adulterously from God, and sought satisfaction at forbidden fountains and

altars, then the Lord brought upon Israel the misery of this degradation and shame. Israel was forced to eat things that were unclean, things that were killed with the blood in them, things that revolted the sense of the nation, and went dead against all the prejudices of education. Thus a badge was taken from the shoulder of Israel; a distinction was removed from the chosen people; they could have borne reproaches on the ground of moral disobedience with comparative indifference, but to have social boundaries and distinctions broken down was a judgment which Israel keenly felt. But the Lord will seize the sinner at some point, for he cannot be baffled in judgment or thwarted in the application of his righteousness. The Lord's judgments are ordered according to our apostasy; God will strike most where we feel most; he will follow our pride and our vanity, and smite them so as to bring upon them the keenest shame. God will not content himself with some general judgment; he will specifically scrutinise, and either reward or punish according to the result of his inquest. Probably no degradation could have been thrown upon Israel more terrible than to eat unclean things in Assyria; but God did not spare even this if haply he might bring back the people from their apostasy, and reinstate them in the defiled and abandoned sanctuary.

"They shall not offer wine offerings to the Lord, neither shall they be pleasing unto him: their sacrifices shall be unto them as the bread of mourners; all that eat thereof shall be polluted: for their bread for their soul shall not come into the house of the Lord" (ver. 4).

The meaning of all these ceremonies and actions was that there was a communication between the heart of man and the throne of God. These are what we now call the means of grace. The drink offering accompanied the peace offering. As the offerer laid his hand upon the burnt offering it was wholly consumed by fire which fell from heaven. By these processes the worshipper acknowledged that he belonged to God, and not to himself. In consequence of repeated sin the means of grace were terminated, and there was no longer open access to the throne of mercy. Sacrifices once pleasing unto the Lord ceased to be pleasing unto him because of the character of those who offered them. Let us understand that our worship is not acceptable simply because our words are right or our mechanism complete, but only because

our spirit is akin to the spirit of God. If we would please God we must be like God. If we would worship a Spirit we must worship in the spirit. Mechanical religion can never satisfy a spiritual claim. There are appointed means of drawing nigh to God, and we are to accept these and use them without question and without doubt, for by their instrumentality alone, so mysteriously are we constituted, can we receive the benediction of the Lord. The Cross is the way to heaven. The Cross is the only plea which a sinner can use with effect in his approaches to the God whom he has disobeyed. It would seem to our reason in its lowest moods as if we could have come in some other way, or could even have devised methods of approach that should be distinguished by intellectual ability; but the Lord will not allow us so to waste our life. He has shown the appointed way, along that way alone will he receive us; but we have the blessed assurance that no man ever travelled that road without reaching the home of God's love and the sanctuary of God's peace. Israel remained under the ceremonial law after all its spiritual significance and utility had been exhausted. So we may go to the appointed place of worship, and find no altar there. In a profound sense we shall only find the altar which we ourselves first bring. In other words, every man must in a sense be his own altar, and before the altar of his penitence and obedience he must plead all the argument which is set up in the incarnation of Christ and the atoning sacrifice of the Lamb of God. The prophet proceeds to show that the sacrifices of a disobedient people should be as "the bread of mourners"; even where they attempted to sacrifice to God the sacrifice would not be accepted, because the spirit was wrong. It is curious to observe how human nature reveals itself in the desire to serve God when God has forbidden such service. Some men never pray until the time of prayer has come to an end. There are lives that never think of immortality until the day dies and the eventide sets in with all its gloomy shadows. There is a time for prayer; there is an opportunity for reconciliation; there is a day of grace. Why not seize this as the acceptable time, and improve the light while it lingers on our way?

PRAYER.

THOU dost call upon us, Father in heaven, through Jesus Christ thy Son our Saviour, to return unto thee and be healed. Thou dost not send for us that we may be punished, but that we may be saved ; thy purpose towards us is a purpose of love, of healing, of redemption, and completeness ; thou wouldst make us perfect in thine own likeness, thou wouldst grant unto us the honour of thine own beauty. Thy voice is amongst the ages as a voice of music ; there is none like it ; its tones fall upon the hearing of the heart, and give hope in despair, light in darkness, comfort amid all the agony of life. May we listen unto the Lord, yea, wait patiently for the utterance of his voice and the indication of his call ; then in a spirit of tender and filial obedience may we arise and do the Lord's will. For all the comfort of life we bless thee ; may we turn its comfort into its discipline, and because the Lord is good may we be true, and because thy mercy endureth for ever may there be no cessation of our love and industry. We bless thee for all hopes that look beyond the cloud ; we rejoice in all inspirations that have in them nothing of earthliness or selfish consideration, but that lead us after the Son of God in the hour when he carried his Cross. When we are faint by the way thou wilt find recovery and sustenance and comfort for us ; when the heart is ill at ease its doors will not be closed in the face of God. We bless thee for those troubles that have brought us to the altar ; for those anxieties and pains which have conducted us to Gethsemane and to Calvary ; for all the discipline that has humbled us, and that has been turned to purposes of sanctification, we bless the Lord as for a great gift choice and invaluable. Only take not thy Holy Spirit from us ; may that Spirit say unto us in the midnight of our fear, All is well : the motion is homeward, and the storm doth but thunder in the air, it does not rend the vessel which is commanded by the Son of God. Thus may we have great comfort, great joy ; hidden, latent, avowed public triumph, all grade and quality of gladness, so that there may be no doubt that we are the temples of the living God. This prayer we say at Christ's dear Cross, where no man ever died, where all broken hearts have found pardon and heaven. Amen.

Chapter ix. 7.

“ The spiritual man is mad.”

SPIRITUAL MADNESS.

LITERALLY, The man of the spirit is mad ; the man of the lying spirit, the man who has determined to deceive the nations : that prophet is declared to be a fool, and that spiritual

man is said to be mad. The man of the lying spirit tells lies ; he has nothing else to tell ; he has given himself up to the prince of darkness and to the powers of evil ; he is not their subject, loyal and devoted, he is their victim, servile, crushed, without self-respect, held in ignominious and eternal bondage. We find in further reading the Scriptures that there is another spiritual man that is also declared to be mad ; concerning the prophet chosen by Elisha himself the question was asked, "Wherefore came this mad fellow to thee ?" Concerning Christ it was said, "He hath a devil and is mad ; why hear ye him ?" St. Paul was declared to be mad ; the apostles had to vindicate themselves against daily charges of insanity or madness. Why so ? Simply because they were spiritual men ; if they had not been spiritual men no critic or foe would have thought of charging them with madness ; but simply and solely because they were spiritual men they were declared in their most conspicuous instance to be beside themselves. Paul said, "If we be beside ourselves, it is to God." There is a madness without which there can be no greatness. Talent is never mad, genius is seldom sane ; respectability is always decorous, enthusiasm sometimes makes a new map of the world every day, lining it and pencilling it according to an eccentricity not to be brought within rules and mechanical proprieties. Socrates declared that the orator was mad, or he could be no orator ; that is to say, so long as the man knew what he was talking about in the conventional sense he had not yielded himself to the spirit of the occasion ; he was not caught up as by a whirlwind, and borne away to unmeasured heights ; he knew not the meaning of that abandonment which is but another word for the highest and most glorious freedom.

Enthusiasm, therefore, is another name for the kind of madness which is described in the Scriptures, and which is commented upon with approval in many pagan writings. There are not many mad men now, if spirituality is the test or standard of madness. It is not the professing Christian that is mad. He may be too sagacious ; he may be too shrewd ; he may be but a calculator. Such a man cannot pray, such a man will always wonder that anybody else can pray ; only the mad heart prays. We must accept this reproach. Any sagacity that is not often

caught in this madness is only sharp-sighted, long-headed, shrewd ; it may touch the borders of pious gambling, but it never enters into the passion of absolute self-forgetfulness ; it never commits that suicide which makes the world of propriety shudder and stand aghast. There are pious people who can count their virtues as they count a row of beads ; they know their good deeds one by one ; they keep them in caskets, they brush them up a little now and then ; they cannot be deceived as to their number. Such people are not pious. They do more harm in the world than all the infidels in creation can do. Infidels never did any harm. Shrewd professors never did any good. Men of mechanical piety never helped the cause of the Son of God. We should have more progress if we had more madness ; we should make a great impression if we had more enthusiasm. The enthusiasm must be content with a poor lot for the time being. Nobody likes to house enthusiasm ; it is like housing a conflagration. People are very careful how they entertain mad evangelists ; they would rather they found a night's lodging in the ditch. As Wesley once said to one of his preachers when they had nothing but haws to eat, "It is a fine place for an appetite." There would be many now who would house John Wesley, because he has been dead long enough to become almost respectable ; but when he was alive he was too much for those people who had to give an account of themselves to their miserable and contemptible neighbours. There are those who would have certain things done in their own houses, but they are afraid that the neighbours might not like it. There have been people in a northern country long ago who would not object to hear a little Psalm upon a piano on a Sunday ; but what would the people next door think of it ? The people next door would be delighted to have the same thing themselves, only they are wondering what the people next door to them would think. Thus the world staggers where it should stand erect ; hesitates and founders where it should go right on.

The spiritual man is necessarily mad in the estimation of the worldly man. The worldly man lives in a very plain way. The multiplication table is all the arithmetic he wants ; bread and lodging constitute his programme to a very large extent, especially if that programme be intersprinkled here and there

with a little amusement of a foaming and transient and inexpensive kind. The spiritual man has no line of the programme ; he actually prefers the invisible to the seen, the impalpable to the tangible ; he is a fool. He says, The real things are not seen ; what we see is not worth looking at, except it be taken in some symbolical and typical way. A great star-filled sky is nothing to him if there be not a heaven beyond it ; he would not loiter in any star he has ever seen ; he would say in the biggest of them, I can tarry but a night. Where would you be ? Onward ! Where ? I cannot tell in words, but I feel that there is a country out of sight which alone can satisfy me. Thus man predicates his own immortality, and even if he cannot put his doctrine into words which he can defend with other words, yet when you have overturned his terms you have left his feeling intact, unharmed. Immortality cannot be argued down. You will disprove immortality when you have extinguished humanity.

The spiritual man is mad because he says that mind is greater than what we know by the name of matter. The old Hebrew thinkers were greatly impressed by bulk and radiance ; they used to cover their eyes when the sun was at noon-tide, lest they should be blinded. The apostles cared nothing for sun and stars ; one of them—in some sense the roughest, rudest of them—said, looking upon the whole panorama of the visible heavens, They shall pass away with a great noise ; they are of less account than a blasted fig. But make Peter a greater poet than David, for David was amazed at the stars ; when he put his shepherd's crook in the belt of Orion he felt he was standing beside a radiant altar. Peter waved them all back and said, Their end is noise ; there is a heat that can melt the hardest of them, and cause them to flow away like a river that is afraid. Thus the spiritual man approaches the miracles from the right point of view ; they are not miracles to him, they were not miracles to Jesus Christ, they were commonplaces to the Son of God. This we cannot understand, because we have a local mind, we have our own temperature, and climate, and barometer, and measuring instruments, and it never enters into the mind of man that there is some other place in the world. The beautiful cared-for plants of Kew are the weeds of the Sandwich Islands.

The weeds of one country are carefully taken note of and cultivated, and men are charged so much per head to look at them.

It is even so in the great spiritual realm. To some men the miracles are absolutely staggering; to other men they are but as the weeds of the Omnipotence of God. If we could see them from the right altitude they would be as nothing to us compared with the moral qualities and the spiritual purposes, the holy, all-redeeming impulses, that throb in the Eternal Heart and constitute the Fatherhood of the universe. Cold reason can do nothing. You have to melt the metal before you can mould it; it is the melting process that has been forgotten by many a tyro in religious enquiry or theological investigation. Suppose the smith should take his metal and his hammer, and should proceed with his work, and should be disappointed in it; what has he forgotten? The fire, the bellows, the roaring fire, the white flame; apply that, then take out the metal, and you may twist it as you will, shape it according to your own desire. You will find it to be so in theological thinking and spiritual investigation. If you think you are going to determine the relative values of things in what you call cold blood, you will never do it. You must have atmosphere, enthusiasm, appropriate elevation of mind; you must have, in the highest sense of the term, madness. In that ecstasy you may begin to see the outline of the kingdom to which all other rulerships, wherein they are true, point, as at once to their origin and their culmination. Men are impressed by what is near. That is a sophism which hinders much Christian progress. You cannot persuade some men that a thought is more valuable than a sovereign. The sovereign is in the hand, and the thought is in the heart. Who would care to pay anything for an idea? And is there a man that thinks he has not discharged his conscience when he has passed an opinion upon that which is offered for his soul's sustenance? A thought is the true wealth: high sentiments are the enduring property; confidence in God is the inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. The time will come when you cannot change your sovereign; it will not be recognised as legitimate currency; offered to angels,

it would be returned with that dumb look which indicates a wise and contemptuous ignorance.

Why will not men be wise in the enduring things, wealthy in the abiding treasure? Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal; lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. When a man talks so he is mad. George Fox was mad. The Quakers now are too wise. There is not a mad Quaker on all the globe; consequently the Quakers are dying out. When George Fox, like John Wesley, was alive he could not hold his tongue; when he saw wrong he cried out; what wonder that he was accounted mad? If now you see some relic of that brave, self-sacrificing enthusiast why, it is in the form of the loveliest—the very loveliest—silk bonnet that would excite admiration everywhere by its quaintness. The world will never mistake that for madness; the world will allow that bonnet to come in and go out as it likes. It is the mad soul the devil cannot do with, and he will not have it if he can burn it out. Young men, we want mad men in the true sense; that is to say, in the sense of enthusiasm, intelligence, in the sense of wisdom on fire, in the sense of conviction that will neither be bribed nor deterred.

The religious or spiritual man is mad because he trusts to a spirit. He says, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." The spiritual man trusts a spirit; he never saw him; he knoweth not the shape of a spirit; he cannot tell his coming or his going, he cannot calculate the orbit of his influence, the measure or the quality of his action; he may be resembled to the wind which bloweth where it listeth, but to other image or type he cannot liken him. The spiritual man prays, apparently, to nothing; the worldly man looks at the closed eyes of the spiritual man, and wonders what he can see through his eyelids. The carnal man listens to the pleading, the supplication, the confession, and the thanksgiving of the spiritual man, and wonders to whom he is speaking. The carnal man cannot understand the things that are spiritual, for they are spiritually discerned; that is to say, they come within the cognition of a spiritual faculty, a spiritual sense,

a distinct specific creation of the Spirit of God within the temple of the human soul. The natural man knoweth not the things that be of God. Yet the spiritual man cannot help praying, cannot help trusting in Providence ; because he sees in history an elaboration and proof of his best theology. The spiritual man has facts to rest upon ; to him history is the Bible rewritten, not the history of one day or of one people, but the history of many days all taken together, and the history of all peoples ; these must be brought under purview if we are to see the shaping of the divine Spirit, the uprising of a mystic temple, more beautiful than light, more delicate than the coloured cloud which veils the sun.

The spiritual man, therefore, is not to be laughed out of his spiritual ecstasy. He has great staying power ; he rests in the Lord. He knoweth not when his Lord will come with the necessary revelation ; he says, It may be at any moment—at cockcrow, at the dawning of the day, in the noontide, in the festival of eventide, but come he will, and make all things clear. Such a man is not to be tolerated in worldly society. Such a man is hated in every city.

The exchange does not want your spirituality ; to the man of money, the mere money-changer, you are a fanatic, a fool, and a nuisance. The worldly heart cannot endure the Christian spirit. That spirit spoils the feast, brings a cloud over the foolish merriment, and hinders the jocund play of those feelings which rise and fall like the bubbles of a moment. If Christian people are popular it is in the degree of their being unfaithful to their Christianity. No son of man can be popular, in the sense of being welcomed into all companies alike, and being felt to fit into every occasion as if he had been made for it. The righteousness that can be silent in the presence of evil is unrighteous righteousness. The soul that can pass by the indifference, the neglect, the cruelty, which mark the history of every day, may say its prayers, but it never prays. If the Church were faithful to her spirituality the Church would be persecuted to-day as at previous periods of history. Do not believe that the devil is converted ; never delude yourselves into the belief of the

sophism that evil has changed its nature. If you are a good man you are welcomed in few places. On the other hand, we must be careful lest men should reason that because they are unpopular, therefore they are religious. The reasoning might be sound, or it might be unsound. Here we must have no delusion. If a man has mistaken the nature of the kingdom of heaven ; if he has turned the law into a piece of moral pedantry ; if he betakes himself to the superficial ministry of addressing prescriptive moralities and preceptive moralities to the people as if he had no need of his own exhortations, then he ought to be unpopular, and he ought to be put down. We are not speaking of that kind of religion, but of the pure, spiritual, trustful, faith-inspired, and faith-directed religion, that will never be popular, and will never have an easy life in this world.

The spiritual man has determined not to eat any bread that is not honestly earned. He brings his piety down to the table. He will not wear clothes that he has stolen ; he will not enrich himself with the spoils of other people. The spiritual man says, I will die honestly if I cannot live honestly ; if there is no room for me in the world, I will go out of it by the door of starvation, rather than spoil and steal, and oppress and call myself a lucky fellow because I have plundered some other man without the man knowing it. So we are called to no formality ; we are called to spirituality ; not to a monastic renunciation of the world, which is a piece of egregious impertinence ; we are called to the right use of the world, to handle it well, to keep it at arm's length when we would have it thus, to use it without abusing it. In that spirit the more the good man has the more we should rejoice ; it is like putting money into the hands of honesty and liberality and the spirit of beneficence ; in that sense we pray for the worldly prosperity of good men, if it be for their good that they should be appointed to high trusteeships. We must bear the reproach of spirituality ; we must be content with the certificate as to the reality of our spiritual madness.

What can be done to develop the real character and quality of true religion ? There must come a revolution presently ; things cannot be continued much longer at their present level and in their

present tone. The pulpit has to be revolutionised ; the Church has to be shocked out of its old ways, and has to reconsider all its positions, and has to study the age in which it lives. If the Church will not study the age in which it lives, the age will leave the Church. The Church in its organised capacity has always been the dullest learner, the most stupid scholar in the school of history. It is always the clerical mind that comes in last, and says, What a fool I have been not to read the signs of the times, and not to anticipate the action of stronger and wider minds. The clerical mind is not in a hopeless condition ; it always comes in late at night, it always comes in by the back door ; but it always does come back. Naturally it is a narrow mind, a little mind, a prejudiced mind, a cage full of birds of prejudice ; but on the whole it generally recognises in the long run its own folly, and asks to be admitted into some department of the court of civilisation. This ought not to be so. The spiritual man should be the keenest-sighted man ; the spiritual man should be the most scientific of all men. He may not be able to write in scientific nomenclature ; he may know nothing about the phenomena of science, but he can have a spirit of sympathy with all knowledge, and he can be the first to say, Let the light come from all quarters ; if anything stands in the way of the light, down with it ; it is light we want, it is light we live on. If the Church would say that the Church would take its right place, and spirituality would be seen to be the madness of wisdom, and not the madness of obstinacy.

The spiritual man sees the invisible, and recognises the fact that everywhere there is a Power that is working and cannot be hindered, an infinite action going on ; shaping, combing, colouring, re-combing, and inter-relating things, and the issue is a temple, beautiful in proportion, grand in massiveness, apocalyptic in colour, hospitable in welcoming all human hearts. Do not live in a little narrow world. Suppose a man should be shut up inside an organ without having seen the instrument itself beyond that point, and he is a man who will keep a little note-book, and write down in that note-book what he calls "phenomena" ; that is, he will put down exactly what he sees. The organ is being played, and he thinks it is playing itself. He writes down,

“Marvellous action. As to this action I am an agnostic; how this comes I don't know; I will put that down in my note-book—Grand action in the organ, but nothing seen that I can understand, and it is very wonderful.” That is down, and that is a “phenomenon.” There go fifteen hammers all moved at once. “Marvellous thing!” Put that down—Fifteen hammers moved, and saw nobody move them. That is another “phenomenon.” What, fifteen different voices—loud, groaning, bass, light, tremulous, a touch, more a thought than a thing. Put that down—“Saw marvellous phenomenon—fifteen voices—and couldn't see who's doing it.” On this matter of whom I am an agnostic. What do I say? I say, Come out of that, you fool! come out, and look at this man on the stool. Why don't you come out? You may be in the organ writing phenomena all the days of eternity. If you would come out into the right light, and put yourself at the right point of view, you would see that many a mystery is no mystery from the right standpoint, and you would see that all the music is not that work of chance, but a measured, ordered, well-handled reality, responding to a human touch, repronouncing human music, trying by many a strenuous effort, and not wholly without success, to reproduce that highest, sublimest, divinest music, the music of the human voice.

Thus I would say to all young people, Enlarge the sphere of your observation. Do not shut yourselves up in endless darkness, and suppose therefore there is no light; wherever there is light follow it. All light is from the sun. The little candle put in the window in the cottage on the mountain side to guide the shepherd home—is that a creation of man? So far; but man never put that light on the wick; that is a drop from the fountain of the sun. So every good effort and every good thing, every holy desire, every noble impulse, we trace not to human ingenuity, but to God the Holy Ghost.

PRAYER.

THOU Giver of all good, we have nothing that we have not received: our bread is thine, our home is of thine own building, our life thou dost watch with the eyes of love; thou dost prevent our hunger, and ere yet we have felt the pain of thirst thou hast provided the river which is full of water. We are the witnesses of thy goodness; we proclaim the loving kindness of the Lord, for we have seen it with our own eyes. There is a cloud by day; there is a pillar of fire by night; there is a voice behind us telling us the right way; there are arms round about us whose strength is infinite. We will rejoice and be glad, and magnify the Lord in many psalms, and will charge our souls not to be disquieted within us, but to hope confidently in God, for they shall yet praise him for the help of his hand and the light of his smile. Thou knowest how easily men are discouraged and driven back into darkness and fear: take not thy Holy Spirit from us;—Spirit of promise and light and liberty and peace. Holy Spirit, dwell with us. We ask the gift of the Holy Ghost because he is to take of the things of Christ, and show them unto us, and we are never wearied of gazing upon the beauties of the Saviour. His wounds are his honours, his suffering is the beginning of his victory, and because he died for us he lives for us; yea, he ever liveth to make intercession for us. We would be more deeply taught in all the mystery of Christ's life and purpose; therefore we pray for the gift of God the Holy Ghost, that he may abide with us, rule in us, cause the light of heaven's morning to shine upon our life, and whisper to the heart in its moments of weakness and dejection. Lord, evermore give us the bread of life; Father in heaven, lead us to the river of God which is full of water; draw us with the cords of a man; cast the yoke gently over our necks, that we may receive it as thy gift and no burden of oppression. Guide us with thine eye; heal us with thy love; let thy tears fall upon us like refreshing dew; may we always know that the Lord is round about us to do us good, if so be our hearts are clinging to the Cross of Christ, and hope in that alone for present pardon and eternal sonship and progress. Amen.

Chapter x. 1-6.

"Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself: according to the multitude of his fruit he hath increased the altars; according to the goodness of his land they have made goodly images. Their heart is divided; now shall they be found faulty: he shall break down their altars, he shall spoil their images. For now they shall say, We have no king, because we feared not the Lord; what then should a king do to us? They have spoken words, swearing falsely in making a covenant: thus judgment springeth up

as hemlock in the furrows of the field. The inhabitants of Samaria shall fear because of the calves of Beth-aven: for the people thereof shall mourn over it, and the priests thereof that rejoiced on it, for the glory thereof, because it is departed from it. It shall be also carried unto Assyria for a present to king Jareb: Ephraim shall receive shame, and Israel shall be ashamed of his own counsel."

AN EMPTY VINE.

THIS chapter is an admirable piece of human criticism, even if it had no claim to that which we gladly assign it, namely, divine inspiration. Viewed from a merely literary standpoint, it is beautiful; listened to as men listen to music, it is enchanting. This we say, apart altogether from its claim to be considered a distinctly inspired criticism and message. Sometimes expositors of the broader sort are charged with reading things into the Bible. It is impossible to read into the Bible anything that is true, wise, pure, good, beautiful,—because all such things are there already; they are the offspring of eternity. Every man should read his own experience into the Bible, that he may see whether he can get it out again or not, and if he can get it out, then he may conclude with himself that his experience is profoundly true. Say to the sculptor: You have read that statue into the marble; Nature did not put it there; when you got that marble into your hands it was without form or beauty or comeliness; all this chiselling, all this shapely suggestiveness, all this almost life, you have put into it. That would be as just a criticism as to say to the true expositor of the Bible, You have read these things into the Bible, if they be things that are in themselves true, beautiful, musical, useful, beneficent, and moving in the direction of heroic and useful life. Say to the composer: You have read that Oratorio into the seven notes of music; the seven notes were simple enough, why were you not content to sound them in their purity, and let them stand for what they were worth? All this Oratorio, sublimity, inventiveness, apocalyptic charm—all this only shows that you have read yourself into the seven notes. It would be just as wise a criticism as to say to the true Bible reader that he had read himself into the Bible, because he finds in that infinite sky all stars, all planets, Pleiades innumerable, ineffable, and burning centres that men dare not even name. He is a poor Bible reader that does not see everything in the Bible. There are a thousand

times ten thousand Bibles in the Bible ; yet all the Bibles are one in their spirit of love, in their purpose of redemption, in the glitter of their beneficent all-illuminating light. Have no confidence in the critic that finds nothing but grammar in the Bible ; have as much confidence in the man who tells you all the literature you need is in the alphabet. He could defend his declaration, but it would be at the expense of his sanity. All literature is in the alphabet ; words are useless in their singularity : so oftentimes are men ; they are nothing in units. The dictionary is nothing in the way of exposition, education, illumination, stimulus, when it stands there in its mere catalogue of words. Words must be put together ; must colour one another ; must combine and recombine, and be made to palpitate with soul : then the dictionary may become a poem, and its catalogue may be evolved into a "Paradise Lost." It is even so with God's book. It is never read : Lord, evermore give us this bread. Let the child read the Bible, and make a child's book of it ; above all, let the woman read the Bible, and get out of it all its music.

"Israel is an empty vine." Yet, literally, it might read, Israel is a luxuriant vine ; he bringeth forth fruit unto himself ; and yet, literally, he brings forth no fruit at all, only long stem and tendril and leaves innumerable ; his fruit is all foliage. The apostle said the grace of God that was in him was not in vain ; that is to say, it was not useless, not introspective ; not only useful to himself, but it was expressive, outwardly, beneficently, feedingly, so that all men who came in contact with that grace ate bread from Heaven and drank the wine of Paradise. The figure is very Hebraic and very grand. Israel is a vine, and a growing vine, but Israel misses the purpose of the vine by never growing any wine ; growing nothing but weed, leaves, and so disappointing men when they come to find fruit thereon and discover none. The Church is an empty vine ; theology is an empty vine. All religious controversy that is conducted for its own sake—that is to say, with the single view of winning a victory in words—is an empty vine,—luxuriant enough, but it is the luxuriance of ashes ; as who should say, His iron safe is full ; open it, and out runs the worthless dust to the ground, without a sparkle of gold, or precious metal of any kind. The safe was full, but full of nothing-

ness ; the vine was luxuriant, but only in that which never yet appeared human hunger. "According to the multitude of his fruit he hath increased the altars ; according to the goodness of his land they have made goodly images." They have gone *pari passu* with the Almighty—he the living Father doing the good, and they the rebellious men doing proportionate evil. When the harvest has been plentiful the idolatry has been large, increasing in urgency and importance ; when the vine has brought forth abundantly another image has been put up. That is the teaching of the prophet ; yea, that is the impeachment of God. God may be represented as saying, Your wickedness has been in proportion to my goodness ; the more I have given you, the less I have received from you ; the larger the prosperity with which I have crowned you, the more zealous have you been in your idolatry ; the more lovingly I have revealed myself to you, the greater your wantonness, selfishness, and rebellion. That is not only Hebrew, it is English ; that is not only ancient history, it is the tragedy, the blasphemy of to-day.

What is the explanation ? Where is the point at which we can stand and say, This is the beginning of the mischief ? The answer is in the second verse, "Their heart is divided." That has always been the difficulty of God ; he has so seldom been able to get a consenting heart. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." That is not a jeremiad ; it is a fact. God says, These people want to do two irreconcilable things—they want to serve God and mammon ; they want to courteously recognise the existence of Jehovah, and then run to kiss the lips of Baal. Their heart does not all go one way ; they cannot wholly throw off the true religion ; it has indeed become to them little better than a superstition, but men do not like to gather up all the traditions of the past, and cast them in one bundle into the flowing river in the hope that it may be carried away and lost for ever. So they come to the altar sometimes ; now and again they look in at the church door ; intermittently they listen to the old psalm and the half-remembered hymn ; but in the soul of them they are drunk with idolatry. There are persons very anxious to maintain orthodoxy who are the most notorious thieves in society ; there are those

who would subscribe to any society to defend Sunday if they might do on Monday just what they liked ; they are zealous about the Sabbath, and specially zealous that other people should keep it, but on Monday you would never imagine that there was a Sunday. " Their heart is divided " ; they have no sympathy with Arianism—largely because they do not know what it is, but have a great horror of it ; mainly because somebody else has been alarmed by it. They would not have any written creed disturbed in jot or tittle ; whatever happens, that creed in its mechanical form must be observed, though it damn three-fourths of the universe without law or reason. This is called orthodoxy ; it is miscalled, not truly denominated ; orthodoxy is love, hope, the very passion of the Cross of Christ. Whilst we train our young men to maintain certain intellectual positions about which the world cares absolutely nothing, we ought to take pains to train them to meet certain moral and social conditions that are actual, that are crying in their necessity, that are tragic in their pathos. Where one man has heard about Arius, thousands of men have felt the torment of a disappointed life. Let us pay less heed to men who are puzzled by ancient history than we pay to those who this very day are slowly dying. " Now shall they be found faulty ; " literally, Now shall they be found guilty. " He shall break down their altars ; " literally, he himself ; for the pronoun is emphatic, as we have read in our Cæsar's Commentaries as boys at school, *ipse*, he himself, Cæsar himself. So here we read, He himself, the living God, " shall break down their altars " ; literally, shall take their heads off. He comes forth and plays the part of a guillotine ; down it flashes, and the head is gone ; he comes forth from eternity as an executioner, and he severs the head from the body. He comes forth as a divine iconoclast and shivers the altar, so that the head of it falls into the dust, and the stump of it is utterly without worth. " He shall spoil their images " : there is a tone of taunting in this ; he shall rub them together, he shall break them in pieces, he shall return them to powder, he shall evolve them the other way, by retrogression and debasement, so that in the morning the idolators will not know their own gods. Why all this decapitation, mockery, and bitterness of taunting ? Because the heart of the people is divided. There is no difficulty in dealing with an

unbeliever—his whole heart is steeped in disbelief; there is no difficulty in dealing with an honest man—his whole soul is bathed in the righteousness and purity of God, his sincerity is his glory and his defence. The difficult man to deal with is the man who prays on Sunday, and robs his customers on Monday; the man it is impossible to make anything of is the creature that mumbles his psalm in the church, and takes the last penny from the oppressed poor when he collects his rents on the following day.

To what straits this heart-divided people were reduced :—

“Now they shall say, We have no king, because we feared not the Lord; what then should a king do to us?” (ver. 3).

The bitterness of that complaint is found in the fact that they had a king, and yet had no king; they had a figure-head, they had a man who was called king, and to whom certain courteous loyalty was reluctantly paid; but as to faculty, true sovereignty, noble influence, he was no king. This is as bad as the divided heart—to be nominally one thing and really another; to have a pulpit, and no gospel; to have a church, but no way out of it to heaven; to have the form of a man, with the heart of a beast: these are the ironies that may be said to perplex and grieve the very Spirit of God. There are those who boast of their consistency; but always be assured that a man has no consistency when he boasts of it. There is a consistency that is worthless; there is a consistency that is consistent with itself, but is inconsistent with the spirit of progress and with the law and necessity of life; the inconsistency that God blames is to be found in a divided heart, and in a nominal sovereignty that is associated with practical subservience. Pity the king who is not royal; pray for the removal of the prince that is not princely; his name will be a burden to him; the very elevation which belongs to his office will become an impeachment upon his manhood. Pity the church that does not save the outcast, feed the hungry, and shelter those who have no home; it is a church, but not a house of God; it may be a Beth-aven, but it is not a Beth-el.

Still the impeachment rolls on, growing in fulness and urgency :—“They have spoken words, swearing falsely in making a covenant”: literally, we should say, Their life is words, words,

words,—Hamlet before the time. Israel is an empty vine, a leaf-bearing vine; Israel is a mass of words, incarnate verbiage, so that even when he makes a covenant he makes it only in words, and when he swears an oath he makes no impression beyond his lips; the oath is not red with the blood of his heart. What is the consequence?—"thus judgment springeth up as hemlock in the furrows of the field." There is judgment enough, but of what kind? Of the hemlock sort. The meaning is, that though there be plentifulness of judgment it is of a poisonous nature; there is a great show of righteousness and equity, and a wonderfully tender care of the law-courts, to preserve them from dilapidation, and to save the judges from imperilling their valuable lives: but they are law-courts of iniquity; the judgment is a lie, and the word of equity is as a dose of hemlock. A graphic figure is this of hemlock growing in the furrows of the field. The idea is that iniquity is cultivated; this is no casual iniquity, this is no hap-chance wickedness, as who should say, How surprised we are to have been confronted by this image of wrong. Nay, verily there is no surprise, for the bullocks were taken out and yoked together, and the plough was set in the field, and the furrow was straightly ripped, and the seed was sown with a liberal hand, and in the black harvest-time hemlock sprang up, and darkness was garnered for judgment. This is human history, this is no ancient dream. Inspired or not inspired, it is an awful book for getting hold of realities, and searching the heart, and trying the reins, and disturbing us by a cruel analysis of our most hidden motives. It may be inspired. How impressive and humiliating the figure that men may make a fine art of the cultivation of judgment—a judgment that is iniquity; how disennobling in the midst of all our fine theories to find that the devil has got hold enough of men to make them artists in wrongdoing! So this judgment is no weed that has grown of itself, this kind of judgment is not to be reckoned as a casual growth; it was thought about, arranged for; it had its seedtime, and the harvest has come to be taken home. Harvest home, harvest home,—hemlock home! You cannot escape the consequences of your actions; you cannot have seedtime of one sort, and harvest of another. Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap. Sow the wind, reap the

whirlwind ; sow hemlock, reap hemlock ; turn judgment into iniquity, and there is nothing like it for quick execution. The finest wine makes the sourest vinegar.

“The inhabitants of Samaria shall fear because of the calves of Beth-aven” ; literally, the cow-calves, she-calves. Poor Samaria, thou art not left even with a bull-calf in sign of strength and nobleness ; fill thy sheds with the cow-calves, and go fall on their necks, and pray to them. “Beth-aven,” literally, the house of vanity ; once that same place was called “Beth-el,” that is to say, the house of God ; and Beth-el has become Beth-aven. Such the deteriorations, the retrogressions, the apostasies of life. How is the fine gold become dim ! How is the noble youth that was going to make quite a giant of a hero doubled up, and shuffling his backward way into a nameless grave ! “The people thereof shall mourn over it ;” but it is a mourning of despair, not a mourning of repentance. Between the one mourning and the other there is an infinite difference. Many men are sorry for the consequences of their acts who are never sorry for the acts themselves. Repentance does not take place in any man who is sorry simply because his action has brought him to ruin. A criminal said, “Have pity upon me, for think of my beautiful house—my beautiful home being broken up !” Not a word about his character being shattered. There are men who prize their furniture more than their reputation ; there are those who are sorry in the morning after the night’s debauch because the head aches, and the blood is in a fever, and the eyes are bleared and unsteady. That is not repentance. He repents who sees the sin in the crime, and who, without hiding the crime, cries before God that he should have offended the spirit of righteousness.

“It shall be also carried unto Assyria for a present to king Jareb” : they shall not only take away the people, but they shall take away their God. Who can be so mocking as the Holy One ? Who can laugh like Jehovah ? Their god shall be taken away, and made a present of to any man who will take it. “I will laugh at their calamity and mock when their fear cometh.” Lord of heaven, God of the Cross, spare us that laughter !

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, if thou hast a controversy with us surely thou dost oftentimes lay it aside that thou mayest comfort us, enrich us, and make us assured of thy presence and thy care. Thou hast set us in wondrous relations: on the one side all is darkness, fear, tumult, uproar; on the other all is quietness, light, beauty, music, hope, the very beginning and pledge of heaven; and between these points how we move, now here, now there; sometimes torn with great pain, and sometimes almost with the angels. The meaning of this is that thou wilt train us for thyself; thou wilt by the agency of thy Holy Spirit cleanse us, purify and ennoble us, and make us meet to be partakers of the inheritance with the saints in light. When we are overborne by the process, may we recover ourselves by thinking of the end. Jesus for us endured the Cross, despising the shame, because he saw beyond, and all the meaning of redemption gladdened his vision. We bless thee that Jesus Christ is our example; being our Saviour and Lord, he is also our exemplar, that we may know what to do and how to do it. He taught us how to bear the Cross, how to die upon the Cross, and how to turn its shame into infinite glory. May we do nothing of ourselves; may we never take counsel with our own foolish wisdom; may we always come to the wise and to the strong and the pure for all we need and want; then shall our life prove that our prayer has been answered. Thou knowest our whole estate—how many men each man is thou knowest, what devils tear him, what angels sing to him; how low in wickedness, how grand in piety; thou canst hear the sob underneath all the music of the world. Surely all this is of the Lord's doing and shaping, and there is meaning in it all; nothing of the agony is lost; every drop of the driving storm is brought into the great bow that spans the heavens in token of reconciliation and peace. Help us to think of the purpose, the end, the meaning of it all; then shall the Cross be no burden, and the way to Calvary shall be only dolorous for a moment, its dolor forgotten in the ineffable rapture and joy of heaven. Help us to continue steadfast unto the end; may our ship not founder within sight of land; may we be brought to our desired haven, and leaving the little earth-ship, may we pass into the glory and the blessedness of heaven. For all who have landed we thank thee. Sometimes they thought they would never land, but would by some evil spirit be overborne and plunged into the sea; and lo! they have set foot on shore, and already their song mingles with the anthems of the angels. Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord, for they shall rest: theirs shall be peace, without ruffle or disturbance; theirs shall be the tranquillity of God. Help us to consider those who have gone before, and to know that we are ourselves expected above; may we not cause the expectation to fail; may we turn no blessed one to the misery of heart-ache and disappointment;

may our best ambition, purified of all dross, be to meet those who have gone before, and to see him who has brought us all together in pure and eternal brotherhood. Hear us for all classes and conditions of men; may those who are representing foreign lands feel themselves at home in the sanctuary of God; forgetting all mere circumstances, may they enter into the spirit of fellowship and be lifted up by sacred music, by noble psalm, and profitable meditation into the highest relations, in which all others are not lost, but are sanctified. Be with those who are heart-weary, and filled with wonder that is quickly becoming pain; save them from the perplexity that would disturb their spiritual quietness, and lead them into the liberty of truest joy. Go into our sick-chambers, and make them chief rooms in the house, the rooms of banqueting and feasting, in which the noiseless angels feed the hunger of the heart. Be with all who are in trouble on the sea; thine is the fulness of the earth, and the fulness of the sea is thine; give thy beloved sleep, and rest, and release from burdensome and darkening fear, and teach them that the sea is in thy keeping as solid as the land. As for those who are away beyond all boundaries, violators, trespassers, wicked souls, that have hated father and mother and house and holy companionship, may they yet be found by a pleading prayer; may the supplication of love throw its golden band around them, so that even they may yet come back with tears in their eyes, such tears as precede joy in the heart. We leave them in thine hands; we know that all the houses in history that have known thee have said with one accord, His mercy endureth for ever. May all lonely ones lose their solitariness in Christ; may all sick ones be recovered by the touch of his gentle fingers, and may all bad men be foiled; may all envious men have the devil of jealousy cast out of their hearts, and may all praying men be able to pray in bolder supplication and in larger claim, because they cover all their prayers with the infinite name of God the Son. Amen.

Chapter x. 8-12.

"The high places also of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed: the thorn and the thistle shall come up on their altars; and they shall say to the mountains, Cover us; and to the hills, Fall on us. O Israel, thou hast sinned from the days of Gibeah: there they stood: the battle in Gibeah against the children of iniquity did not overtake them. It is in my desire that I should chastise them; and the people shall be gathered against them, when they shall bind themselves in their two furrows. And Ephraim is as an heifer that is taught, and loveth to tread out the corn; but I passed over upon her fair neck: I will make Ephraim to ride; Judah shall plow, and Jacob shall break his clods. Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you."

AN OVERTHROWN ALTAR.

"THE high places also of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed." We have seen that "Beth-el" means The house of God, and that by iniquity, manifold and black, Beth-el

was turned into Beth-aven, and that Beth-aven means The house of vanity. This is an instance of deterioration, and more than mere deterioration; it is an instance of transformation from good to bad, from the heights of heaven to the depths of the world of fire. Such miracles can be accomplished in the individual character, and such miracles have been found possible in ecclesiastical relationship. Nature will not let things alone at any given point; nature is a destroyer; its very growths, if not checked and regulated, may come to express judgment, destruction, ruin. But the case is worse. We now read of "the high places also of Aven"; the "Beth" is left out: once it was Beth-aven, the house of vanity; now nothing is left but the vanity itself. As a house it was significant of definition, limitation: it was so much and no more for the time being; but the walls of definition have fallen down, the hedges and the boundaries are taken away, and there is nothing left but the smoke of vanity. That is the process of unchecked, untaught, unsanctified nature. We say of a man, He has still one or two redeeming qualities: he is sober, he is punctual, he is not wholly without feeling in the presence of sorrow or weakness. Gladly we point out two or three features that are supposed to be of a redeeming kind, and we gladly infer that so long as these exist the man may be saved, restored, set up again with rights and privileges in the household of God; but the time comes when every redeeming feature is lost, every fair line is blotted out, every sweet little thing that seemed to be as a prophecy in the life, foretelling summer, deliverance, and blessed immortality, is driven out; then men say of the abandoned one, Aven, vanity, all vanity and vexation of spirit, nothing of strength or beauty left; the whole man has gone away, and the brightest angel despairs of bringing him back again. The sin of Israel was the building of houses of vanity, the erection of altars on high places. Israel was theologically inventive; as soon as one pantheon was burned down Israel put up another. What is the issue according to prophetic instinct?—"The thorn and the thistle shall come up on their altars." The words "come up" are very significant as originally used. Men always go "up" to the metropolis; no man goes "down" to London, Paris, St. Petersburg; to the capital, come from what place soever men may, they go up. It is even so with the house of God: no man

goes down to church ; the tribes go up ; be the church ever so humble, and geographically or typographically be it in ever so little a place, no man goes down to it. To pray is to go up ; to attend the humblest meeting-house is to ascend.

The mocking prophecy is full of bitter irony and taunt. The thorn and the thistle shall go up, come up, ascend to the altar ; living men shall no longer be found there, disappointed souls shall have vanished from such mean altars ; but now the worshippers shall be thorn and thistle, and weed of every name and quality. This the infinite mockery of God pronounced upon all merely natural religion. If men want nature they shall have it. God will remonstrate and expostulate, yea, he will solicitously importune them not to play such folly ; but if they insist upon it they shall have nature in an abundance of growth, they shall be choked with its very luxuriance. Picture the altar with the thorn and the thistle growing all over it. Is there aught so mournful as an abandoned king ? The very greatness of his former estate throws into humiliating contrast his present condition. A little cottage lying in a ruin is pathetic enough in its suggestions, for who can tell what births were there, and weddings, and little festivals, dances of glee and songs of innocent wildness ? Who knows what honeysuckle grew there, or what roses jewelled the humble door ? Who can tell how long and merrily the cradle was rocked there, and what little simple tragedies were wrought out under the unnamed and unknown roof ? Every house has its sacred histories. But to see a great palace, a solemn, massive, magnificent architectural pile unroofed, the owl and the satyr hooting in it, and nature weaving her green robe as if to hide some mortal wound,—what a sight is that ! Compared with all such sights there is no vision so terrible, so humiliating, so instructive, as an overthrown altar—a place once made sacred by prayer laughed at by nature, tormented as it were by a spirit of vengeance ; dismantled, overthrown, mocked, leaped upon as if by invisible beasts of prey. There is but a step between thee and death. O man of genius, thou dost live next door to insanity ; praying man, seraphic soul, one little step, and thou art with Lucifer. The altar will not save us, it must represent the altar of the heart ; the outward sanctuary is no defence, it must represent

by holy tender symbol the fortress of omnipotence, the very arms of Jehovah. "And they shall say to the mountains, Cover us ; and to the hills, Fall on us." So much for nature-worship. A mountain should be satisfied with admiration, and we ourselves should be satisfied in according admiration to a mountain ; or say for admiration wonder, with some touch of almost reverence in it : the pile is so vast that where other little hills catch only green patches, it goes high enough to catch the snow. But there must be no worship of nature ; men must not even worship the sun. The sun is only an infinitised sparklet ; it is nothing in itself. There never flew a comet through the sky that could not be put into a thimble. We must use nature, seek out the purpose of God in nature ; use the mountains as stairways leading to something beyond themselves, and we may be most grateful to nature, responding to every tone of music, answering every appeal of abundance ; but worship we must keep for God. If we will persist in worshipping the material, the natural, the outward, at last it will come to desiring the very thing we have worshipped to fall on us. We exhaust nature ; we spend the stars, and are paupers after the revel. It is only God that is everlasting ; it is only Christ who has unsearchable riches ; it is only the Holy Ghost that can train man into perfectness, and therefore into rest and peace and the very quiet of the calm of God. There is no picture in all the gallery of Holy Writ so terrible as that which represents men as seeking death, and not finding it ; desiring to die, and death fleeing from them. So men shall say to the mountains, Cover us ; and it will be as if the mountains rooted themselves more firmly to the rocks on which they rest : men shall say to the hills, Fall on us ; and the hills will fail to answer. For "mountains," for "hills," put any other terms that suggest false worship, false trust, profane loyalty—put money, health, influence, greatness of any kind, all things that are not in God and of the quality of God ; and according to the will and purpose of God, they come to this, that they disappoint their devotees, and turn their worshippers into victims. Such has been the consistent story of human experience.

"It is in my desire that I should chastise them" (ver. 10).

That is a graphic expression ; the whole meaning of it does not

appear in the English tongue. God does not willingly afflict the children of men ; it is not the delight of Almightyness to crush. It is the vanity of considerable strength to tyrannise, but in proportion as strength becomes complete it pities, it spares the helpless, for it knows that by one uplifting of its arm, and the down-bringing of the same, it could crush every opponent. Imperfect strength is a despot : Almightyness is mercy. But now there is a stirring in the divine emotions. God says, It will be better for these people to be afflicted ; they have left nothing for themselves now but depletion, and they must be brought to the very point of extermination. "It will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies" ; "Thus shall mine anger be accomplished, and I will cause my fury to rest upon them, and I will be comforted." These are not the first words that God utters. Their meaning is in their postponement. Our eloquence has to be forced out of us. The Lord is very pitiful and kind, and his eyes are full of tears, and judgment is his strange work ; but there have been times in the history of Providence which could only be consistently and rationally construed by granting that even the divine Father must be stirred to the desire to chastise and humble wicked men. "And the people shall be gathered against them, when they shall bind themselves in their two furrows." Change the grammar if you would see the deeper meaning. Not, They shall bind themselves ; but, They shall be bound as well. There shall be a voluntary act, but above that there shall be a confirmation of that act, that shall turn the change of it into an impossibility. Men bind themselves with a yoke, and God takes care to lock that yoke upon them. It is a human act, and it is also a divine act. Men will enclose themselves in their concealed chambers that they may perpetrate what iniquity they please, and when they have fastened themselves within, God fastens them without, the door closes on both sides ; so when the revellers have ceased their carnival, and seek to return, lo ! the door is locked on the other side. When will men see the two sides of everything, the corresponding aspects of every action ? Life is not, as we have often seen, a series of dissociated accidents ; it is one and the same, a continuity, an ongoing process, every part of which belongs to every other part. "They shall bind themselves in their two furrows" ; that is to say, they shall be unanimous in sin ; they never could

draw equal furrows before them. In everything that expressed discipline, wise training, right education, submission to divine law, the furrow was crooked, the furrows when two were drawn together were dissimilar; the ox and the ass could not plough equally; the furrows betokened reluctance on the part of the plough, or restiveness, or ill-behaviour; but now men can be unanimous in sin who never could get into accord in prayer, in benevolence, in noblest thinking. There are fellowships of darkness; there are men who unhappily can agree in spoiling the helpless, in wrecking the poor, in doing mischief. Ask them to agree in theological opinion, and they instantly fly away from the suggestion involving, as they suppose, an impossibility. Propose to them to act in accord upon any really noble question, and you will find their minds most inventive in the originating of excuses, difficulties, and hindrances of every name and degree; suggest to them that they should drink out of the same goblet, and they will seize the goblet with avidity; suggest that they should co-operate in evil, and the devil never had servants who more eagerly engaged in his service. How many are the compacts in life that are based on a determination to do that which is wrong! Pilate and Herod were made friends one day. They who were dissimilar in thought and feeling were united under circumstances of the most tragical interest. There must be binding; yoke upon yoke must be added to the neck. The question is, whether we will submit to a yoke that is imposed upon us for the outworking of our ruin, or whether we will listen to the voice that says, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest: take my yoke upon you; my yoke is easy, my burden is light." A yoke you must have, says every voice wise in history: it is for man to say whether he will be yoked as a beast, or whether he will be disciplined as a child of God.

"And Ephraim is as an heifer that is taught, and loveth to tread out the corn" (ver. 11).

Poor Ephraim! History has no good word to say about Ephraim. Ephraim, though carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle; Ephraim is as an heifer that is taught, whose appetites are excited and trained and directed along certain lines, and Ephraim loveth to tread out the corn. Is not that

a compliment to Ephraim? Have we not in Jewish history seen the patient oxen going round and round the mill, and causing the stones to revolve so that the corn might be ground? Is not that a very excellent thing to do? No, not for Ephraim, because Ephraim gets advantage from this. "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn." Ephraim wanted plenty to eat; put Ephraim in a pasture, and he was most buoyantly, though selfishly, obedient and religious; put Ephraim to treading out the corn where he could fill himself from morning till night, and he walked as if an obedient child. There are too many men who are wonderfully obedient and pious when they are making gain by it. History is not wanting in instances in which men have apparently been going about their business in the most faithful, obedient, scrupulous manner, when in reality they were only going about it in order that they might eat the feast. Hence the meaning of the words that follow: "But I passed over upon her fair neck": I handled the yoke daintily, I did not force it upon the face of Ephraim, as if to break his teeth in the act of putting the yoke over the neck; but I acted daintily; I studied the occasion, I watched when Ephraim lifted the head, and presently the yoke was put over the fair neck, and that which lifted itself in pride found itself to be bent down in humiliation. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." We never know what God is doing. In the very midst of our rioting and feasting he slips a yoke over our fair neck, and we who sat down as guests remain as prisoners. "I will make Ephraim to ride." The grammar must be changed in order to get at the meaning: I will send a rider upon Ephraim, who shall so handle the bridle and dig the spurs into his quaking sides as to make him feel that he is no longer master. "Judah shall plow, and Jacob shall break his clods": they shall begin at the other end of the work; they shall not have all the corn-grinding and corn-eating to do, but they shall plough, do the hard work. "And Jacob shall break his clods": clods that he cannot eat; if he attempt to eat them, they shall break his teeth as with gravel-stones. Judah and Jacob shall be taught to work, to do what is useful, and by-and-by they may have plentifulness of bread. Until this is done nothing is done solidly in life. If you have not learned how to make your money's worth your money is

of no use to you ; if you are operating by trickery or by falsity, the end is simply disappointment and possible ruin. He who cannot plough and break his clods has no right to the loaf. We have only a right to the bread we have worked for. When men understand this, boys will be brought up to be independent. No boy is independent who cannot work. There is only one independent man in the world, and that is the working man. He is independent in poverty ; nature lives for him, nature waits for him, nature says to him, I am your humble servant. A man who has only money can lose it ; a man who has skill has treasure in a bank that will not fail. This is the difficulty of all education—to bring parents to understand that their children must be taught to plough and to break up the clods. No, it is better that the boy should be clothed in broadcloth, and should have white hands, and should not be put to any inconvenience ; the boy must not go out at five in the morning, and yoke horses and get the plough into the furrow and attend to the drudgery of husbandry,—the boy must be a “gentleman farmer” ! This is called kindness. The boy will live to curse the cruelty of such benevolence.

“Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy.” Rather, Sow righteousness in the proportion of mercy : as God has been merciful to you, so be ye righteous to him ; keep pace for pace with the divine mercy : be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect ; be ye holy as your Father in heaven is holy. This is the ideal ; God would have human righteousness in proportion to divine mercy. The standard is not arbitrary, it is gracious and tender and condescending ; but who can attain unto it ? It is not in man that liveth to keep pace with God. “Break up your fallow ground” : this is not the order of husbandry. The Scripture cares nothing for your orders and chronologies. This Book in particular is a book that is urgent, energetic, tumultuous in its style. There are those who will only go with the clock, and have the clock strike two after it has struck one ; this Book will strike twelve after one, and ten after seven. It is God’s indicator ; it will excite attention ; it cares nothing for your mechanical orders ; it rushes, roars, exclaims as with a trumpet voice, whispers as if delivering the message of burdened life,

"Break up your fallow ground." Stir your souls, put on your strength, excite yourselves to the highest, noblest animation ; no longer live the life of indifference, but live the life of enthusiasm and passion : make the best of yourselves ; cultivate every out-of-the-way corner of your lives : break up, break up, break up ; prepare for the harvest. "For it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you." It is always time to seek the Lord ; let us say here, It is high time, it is more than time ; the hour is almost past—up ! It is the appeal of one who would stir the sluggard from his sloth, and break in upon the glamour of his destructive dreams. "Till he come and rain righteousness upon you." That is an unfamiliar figure ; that, indeed, is not the figure which the prophet represented. To rain righteousness means, in the Scriptures, to teach righteousness. Here some of the ripest and holiest commentators have found what they believe to be a prophecy of the coming of the Holy Ghost. It is the business of the Spirit to convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment to come ; it is the function of the Spirit to reveal the righteousness of God. We are therefore to seek the Lord till he come, in some form or personality of ministry, to represent righteousness, to teach righteousness, to make the world forget all its mistakes, and begin anew, to do the right thing and the beautiful thing. No prophet could anticipate the coming of the Holy Ghost who did not first accept in his deepest consciousness the coming of the Son of God, the Saviour of the world, from whom, as from the Father, proceedeth the eternal Spirit. Whilst we are anxious not to import meanings into the Bible, we should be equally anxious not to impoverish the Bible of its richest suggestiveness.

Chapters x., xi.

CORDS AND BANDS.

"In a morning shall the king of Israel utterly be cut off" (x. 15).

THERE are various interpretations of this vivid passage. The one which is to be, in my judgment, preferred is that which regards the king of Israel in the light of one who has risen upon the troubles of his nation as the dawn rises upon the darkness. Hoshea was the last king of Israel. When the people hailed him on his accession they said in their hearts, This is he who shall bring liberty and joy and fame to Israel. They regarded him as a morning after a long weary night. They said, This same shall comfort us ; he is a strong man and wise, and his heart is bound up with the fortunes of Israel, and he shall be the deliverer of the people. They were doomed to disappointment ; the bright dawn perished, the light of hope went out—the sky that was to have been filled with glory carried with it a sullen cloud. The king of Israel was cut off, he disappointed the people ; whatever talents he had were not spent in the interests of his nation ; whether incapable or false, he let fall the fortunes and destinies of his people. How many men there are who have disappointed their families ! If we said, There are many men who have disappointed the world, the sentiment might be received with general applause—it is one of those heroic deliverances which leave every person unharmed—but we say, How many people there are who have disappointed their families ! Then we come closely home to men ; then we set up a process of self-examination, ending in a process of self-conviction and self-reprobation. See, however, if this be not true. The parents have said concerning the child, "This same shall comfort us," and he has failed to shed one beam of light on the kind old hearts. The parents have said, "This same shall be wise, honest, honourable, chivalrous, heroic ; men shall know that

he lives and shall bless the day of his birth," and suddenly the light has set, the promise has sunk in disappointment, and they who prophesied gracious things of the child are broken in heart. If what is called, atheistically, fate has anything to do with the disappointments which we inflict upon our kindred and our country, we must in some degree submit. We need not, however, be parties to the disappointment; we can be good if we cannot be great; we can be faithful if we cannot be brilliant; we can help a child if we cannot teach a king. The only thing we have to aim at in life is to win the recognition, "Well done, good and faithful servant,"—not Brilliant soldier, Splendid genius, Unprecedented statesman, but Good and faithful servant, making the best of everything, watching every opportunity, rising early to catch the light and to prevent the singing lark, to go before as if to seek out occasions of beautiful, unselfish, yea, self-sacrificing service. Blessed is he whose early promise comes to noble fruition, and blessed are they who own him as their child. Do not let us be discouraged because we cannot do great things. All good things are great; the moral is the eternal.

The Lord continues his lament over his chosen one, and puts his plaint into the tenderest form of expression:—

"When Israel was a child, then I loved him" (xi. 1).

The meaning is not, necessarily, when Israel was an infant, a child in mere years, but when Israel was a child in spirit, docile, simple of mind, sincere of purpose, true in worship. When Israel lifted his eyes heavenward and sought for me, then I stooped over him as a man might stoop over his child to lift him into his arms and press him closely to his heart. There is a unit of the individual; let us take care lest we rest there, and so miss the ever-enlarging revelation of the divine purpose in human history. There is not only a unit of the individual, there is a unit of the nation. Israel is here spoken of as if he were one man, a little child; though a million strong in population, yet there was in the million a unit. This is one aspect of divine providence. We must not regard nations as if they ceased to have status and responsibility, name and destiny before God. A nation is one; a world is one; the universe is one. What does God know of our

little divisions and distributions into pluralities and relationships? The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof, and the sea is one, and all his creation is dear to him as an only child. So the nation may have a character. The Church is one, and has a reputation and an influence. So we come upon the divine handling of great occasions. The Lord is not fretted by details. All the details of his providence come out of and return to one great principle of redeeming Fatherhood. The locks are innumerable; the key is one, and it is in the Father's hand: let him hold it. Father in heaven, never cease to hold the key thyself with thine own right hand!

Sometimes the Lord condescends to tell what he has done for the world. When men forget him he must remind them of what they have seen and what has been done for them. Ingratitude has a short memory:—

“I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms; but they knew not that I healed them” (xi. 3).

The picture is one that befits the life of the nursery. We have seen how a child is taught to walk; we have watched, partly with amusement, and partly with apprehension, early efforts at locomotion—how unsteady the eye, how uncertain the action of the little limbs. Still the lesson was to be taught; it was the beginning of a career. It is easy to measure the first walk, but who can lay a line upon all we do which that first walk begins? Devious is the way of life; a thousand paths break away from the central road, and some adventurous spirits go down by-paths to get their first sight of the devil. God's complaint is that “they knew not that I healed them.” We have given up in many instances the divine personality, the living, loving, redeeming Fatherhood of God; and with what are we now satisfied? With fine words, with pompous syllables, with the continuity of law. Many a man will accept the theory of the continuity of law as if he were accepting the simplest proposition. The continuity of law is as great a mystery as the continuity of God. Yet we are deceived by names. Law is abstract, law is impersonal, and is something to be talked about, but never to be seen; but personality means criticism, companionship, benediction, reproach, malediction, heaven, hell. Men do not like to be pressed upon so forcibly. Think of any man in full

possession of his senses supposing that continuity of law is a simpler expression than the Fatherhood of God. We never saw God; we never saw law; we never saw anything. We might see more if we looked more closely; we might see further if we cleansed the lense through which we look, that lense the heart; and blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. They are sensitive, they are responsive; every ray of light tells upon them; every whispered word, though it has been millions of ages in coming from world to world, falls on them like a gospel, and they answer it with praise. We now put away the personality of God, and accept the law of development. The mystery is, that so many persons should imagine they have given up the complex for the simple, whereas they have simply stepped out of dawn into midnight, out of sunlight into noliht; they have needlessly created mysteries, and needlessly forgone the tenderest charms, companionships, and benedictions of life. "They knew not": there is moral obstinacy, denseness, stupidity; they did not know the divine touch. Had it been a rude touch, a violent seizure, they would have exclaimed and inquired about it; but who has soul enough to know a touch, a whispered word, a sign meant for the deepest recesses of the spirit? Who does not outbody God, outflesh him? What soul there is is so deeply buried in the flesh that men do not know God in the light of the morning, in the glory of the noonday, in the harvest that ripples like a golden sea in the autumn; they do not know God in the morning meal, in the nightly rest, in the wind that seems to be a spirit of pity when it blows around the shorn lamb.

"They did not know." Is there any word we dislike more in the family than the word "I forgot"? Can the heart forget?—forget to open the window, to assist the child, to take a message, to speak kindly to the sick and the ailing and the feeble. Forgot! O blank heart, foolish, foolish mind! Yet we who are so justly irritated by human and social forgetfulness are charged in many a chapter of divine history with not knowing that the Lord has filled both our hands, and caused to flow before our dwelling-place a river of blessing; nay, more, we have been curious in our mental action, for we have suggested a thousand conjectures to get rid of God. This desire to thrust out the Lord is one of the

clearest proofs of the real moral condition of mankind that we could have. The charge against Ephraim is the charge made against ourselves.

"I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love" (xi. 4).

The figure is that of subjugating the heifer. Beasts were drawn with cords, it may have been with iron or chains; they were forced into servility; they were beaten and chastised into humiliation; they were made to obey the human will. The Lord represents himself as drawing his people with cords of a man, with bands of love; he will persuade them, he will lure them, he will reason with them, he will sit down and comfort them, he will gently lead his people into truth and righteousness and security. None can chastise like God; our God is a consuming fire; a whip of scorpions is nothing to the thong with which he could flagellate the human race if he pleased; but he will love man, come down to man, make himself of no reputation, and take upon him the form of a servant that he may save man. Call this poetry—it is poetry that touches the heart, that inflames the imagination, that satisfies the soul when the soul realises most truly its own personality, necessity, and destiny. The whole gospel scheme is a scheme of persuasion. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us"; herein is the mystery of love that man should die for his enemies. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be." Everywhere there are the cords of a man, the bands of love, the elements of persuasion, a wrestling, entreating, persuasive God. Regard it in what light we may, there is nothing to compare with it for ineffable tenderness, for the sacred unction that touches the heart when the heart most needs a friend.

"And the sword shall abide on his cities, and shall consume his branches, and devour them, because of their own counsels" (xi. 6).

The Lord takes the wise in their own craftiness; he allows men to work up their programmes, and bring them to a fine point; he permits builders to go so far up with their tower; he allows men to whet their swords, and to lift those weapons of war as if in defiance, but he will only allow them to take down the sword in

such a way as to bring the gleaming point of it into their own heart. The meaning of this passage is that the very opposite shall occur to that which the counsellors proposed. Men shall dig pits for others, and fall into them themselves; men shall build a gallows on which to hang their enemies, and they shall swing from the gallows-tree themselves, and none shall pity them as they perish in the air; the bad man shall plan his plot, and lo, when he would go home to watch the outcome of it, he cannot lift his feet: he made the snare, let him break it if he can. Here is the action of a mysterious power in life, that men are always made, when they oppose God, to do the very things they did not want to do; they will build a place in which they will be secure from the Lord God Almighty, and lo, they are obliged to see that very tower that was to have excluded the Eternal turned into a sanctuary for his adoration.

Another complaint is very graphically and tenderly expressed:—

“And my people are bent to backsliding from me” (xi. 7).

The figure is that of a man who seizes a crossbeam; holding to that beam with his hands, he swings from it; there is an oscillatory motion, but there is no progress; the hands clutch the crossbeam. So the Lord says, “My people are bent to backsliding from me”; they seem to be making progress, but are making none; the centre is always the same, the movement is pendular; it passes from point to point, but the points are always the same; the centre never changes: they are bent on iniquity, they are attached to lies. Who has not seen this very figure personalised in his own case? We have wanted to do two different things at the same time, and that miracle has lain beyond the possibility of our power; we have wanted to keep the Sabbath day, and do what we like on the day succeeding, and the days would not thus be yoked together by our evil hands; we have wanted to be nominal Christians and real downright atheists, and the Lord would not permit this infamous irony. My people are bent upon backsliding from me; they keep hold, and the body moves as if progress were being made; but I judge not by the oscillation, but by the clutching fingers, and these fingers are still laid upon things that are forbidden. What then will the Lord do? He will suddenly destroy these men; he will burn them with unquench-

able fire; he will treat them as chaff is treated—they shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace, and go up as smoke. Nay, hear the Lord, and say if that prophecy be true:—

“How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together” (ver. 8).

This is the voice of a pleader. Ephraim had done wrong, but the Lord said, He may still do right, and I will not give him up utterly. How shall I deliver thee, Israel, when I have set my love upon thee, and fixed mine expectation upon all thy progress? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? (two cities of the plain, salted with fire, devoured and poisoned with brimstone.) How shall I burn Ephraim? There are some things we do not want to burn; we hold them long over the fire before throwing them into the hungry flame; we say, Let us try once more, let us begin again? How shall I burn Ephraim? How shall I reduce Israel to ashes? How can I set fire to my only son—to the prodigal that wounded me, to the life that disappointed me? Even yet the prodigal may come home. I have burned Sodom and Gomorrah; I have burned Admah and Zeboim; I have choked the plain with brimstone, but I cannot give up these hearts, though they grieve me every day. How shall I, how *shall* I, how *can* I? That is the voice of eternal love. God never willingly destroys. He is a God of salvation; he wants the worst to be saved; he wants none to be burned. God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. The Son of man came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them. Nothing would be easier for God than to burn up the universe; but to save it—what does that require?

Chapter xii.

DIVINE CRITICISM.

SOME of these chapters seem to be wholly out of our reach. It is difficult to understand what relation we can sustain to them: are they historical, symbolical, typical, imaginative, real, poetical,—dreams or facts? What difference is there between a fact and a dream? Coming to higher interpretations, and looking at wider issues, which is the fact? Probably we shall get at the meaning of this chapter best by trying to find in it a divine standpoint. It is God that talks much in this chapter: what is he talking about? The voice is the voice of judgment; the divine finger is used critically, pointing out flaw and blemish, and stain and sore, and deep wound and shameful traces of backsliding. How does God look upon the affairs of men? To listen to his voice will be to hear the voice of judgment, truth, wisdom, love. We do not get at the meaning of such chapters by merely grammatical exercises; they were written invisibly before grammar was conceived, and they abide in all the inner thinking, dreaming, and agony of life after language has told us its last word and given up the ghost. Except men have eyes that see within they are blind. All literalists are victims; they are clever within the four corners of the alphabet; they flutter, but never fly.

God shall pronounce judgment upon the ways of men. "Ephraim feedeth on wind, and followeth after the east wind," and thinketh all the time that he is making a great feast. There is nothing old, in the sense of exhaustion and obsolescence in that delusion. The figure is that of Ephraim, who shall stand for mankind, seated at the table, and trying to fill himself not with wind only, but with the east wind, drying, scorching, withering, and all the while seeming to enjoy himself, and to be supplying his necessities

with abundance. There is a satirical tone in the criticism ; as if it said, Ephraim has so outlived himself, so divested himself of his soul, that he mistakes wind for solid food, and drinks up the east wind as if he were feasting on the wine of the vineyard of heaven. This is the most pitiable plight that man can be in ; when he does not know that he is a sinner, when he is not aware that he is playing the fool, when he is so using life as to miss the genius of all its laws, and the benediction of all its divinest ministries, then has he succeeded in obliterating the divine signature and quenching the divine aspiration. This was the case with Ephraim ; the wind was enough, the east wind blowing across the arid deserts was joy to him, and daily he became more eloquent in falsehood. If a man will feed upon the wind, and try to get behind the east wind, and find all his enjoyments in such frivolity, such criminal expenditure of human energy, the result will be a deeper and deeper alliance with all the black spirits of falsehood. The census of that black world has never been taken. The wind is full of spirits. The apostle indicated this marvellous element in human life and human experience when he exhorted the Ephesian Church to put on the whole armour of God ; said he, You are not wrestling with flesh and blood, else then would wood or steel do ; but ye wrestle with principalities and powers and the rulers of the darkness of this world, with the spirits that take the stars out of the night, and leave nothing but the blackness of darkness. Men graduate in the school of falsehood ; the first lies they tell are not the cleverest they will tell. At first there may be a kind of unsophisticated infantile frankness about lying ; a blush will come to say, I have told you a lie, and you seem to believe it. By-and-by the cheek will blush no longer, but will be as white in lying as in prayer. Ephraim "daily increaseth lies and desolation" : one lie begets another. No lie can live alone ; it must have some sponsor, or defender, or expositor. Lies are a progeny ; they live in nests. Yet lies may be spoken of in the singular number. This is the mystery of depravity, that a man may tell so many lies that at last he himself shall be a lie. Beware the entrance not to a quarrel only, but to falsehood, dissimulation, tergiversation—ought that tampers with the integrity and flawlessness of truth that seamless chrysolite.

"The Lord hath also a controversy with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his doings will he recompense him" (ver. 2).

Yet Jacob did not know it; Judah was not aware of it. Men often lose the key. The lock is always there, but the key has been mislaid. A man may so use his brain as to forget his name, his residence, the broadest distinctions of tone and colour and personality; then he will begin to wonder how it is that things happen so. He has done nothing to account for them; he considers himself an object of commiseration; he has lost what he had in his hands, and he knows not where he set it down or let it fall. Some thief must have robbed him in his sleep. When will man be honest with himself, and speak the truth to himself, and say, Judah, thou art a liar; Jacob, thou art a hypocrite: the reason is in thee, not out of thee? If the kingdom of God is in a man, so is the kingdom of the devil. Look within for the lost key; look within for the reason of the unexpected and tormenting flagellation. That would kill us; this would put an end to all festivity and joy and satisfaction; this would turn life into a daily torment. Better so than that we should continue to feast upon the wind and follow the east wind, and daily increase in lies and desolation. A crisis must occur now or then. Blessed is he who says, It shall occur now; this moment shall self-examination begin; this instant I will find out the cause of this disease: I will not let the light go until I have exposed the secret of this torment and suffering, this pain and loss and inward hell. How gratifying it is to our little vanity, and our many-sided and insidious selfishness, to think that God is chastening us, when he is in reality auditing our accounts, and asking for the rectification of them. There is a chastening providence, there is a process into which men are passed without traceable reason on their own account as to conscious iniquity: but there is also a judgment that has reasons on every side of it, there is a judgment that explains itself to the heart; that says, ere it bring the blow down upon the quivering life, You provoked this, you deserve this, you need this; to say you deserve it may be the beginning of penitence and restoration. Yet how difficult it is for God to be only judge. He gives way in the middle of his judgment. It would seem as if he could scarcely carry a judgment right through to the very

end; his tears get the better of him; he cries when he pronounces sentence; yea, the sentence seems to be pronounced upon himself; in judgment and in wrath he remembers mercy.

Hear this tone in the midst of all the thunder: "The Lord will punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his doings will he recompense him." The punishment shall not be in excess of the way; it shall be a measured visitation. God will not load all his thunder upon some poor insect of a moment; the Lord's hand is not lifted up in anger divorced from reason, and torn away from the grasp of mercy. So we come to a new rule of the interpretation of human conduct and divine judgment. Whatever punishment has befallen us, it is measured by our sin. If the pain has been great, it is because the sin has been proportionate; if the darkness has been without one starry smile, one glint of nocturnal light, it is because in some hour of base apostasy we have outdone Iscariot. So spare not the knife. This is not murder, it is surgery; every thrust of the knife has healing in it. Let a man examine himself, pierce himself, criticise himself, find out the secret of himself, and carefully look at himself in the noontide of divine illumination. Any man taking this course will have no difficulty about the doctrine of depravity. It is when a man shall wash himself, and put on his best garments, and sit down to some smoking feast, that he begins to doubt the foolish theologians who discourse upon human depravity. We would not take that man's opinion upon any subject in heaven or on earth until he is changed by his environment. Some night when he skulks home under the shelter of the friendly darkness, having nothing in his throat but a sob, and nothing in his heart but a fatal wound; some night when he tries to say with livid lips, God be merciful to me! we may take his opinion upon the doctrine of human apostasy.

"He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and by his strength he had power with God: yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto him" (vers. 3, 4).

This was Jacob; but Jacob was unconscious of it all. We make a mistake when we think of Jacob as a unit, a man amongst men, when all these symbolical representations are made of him.

We cannot get away from the letter ; we go into the alphabet and shut the door behind us, and cannot get out again, and there we construct all manner of incoherent philosophy and theology. "Jacob" was not a personality only, a unit ; he was a symbol, he was a figure in the algebra of God's mysterious equation of providence and spiritual action and redeeming interposition. Enlarge the field of vision ; enlarge the personality into the multitudinousness of its significations : then we shall get rid of small elections and neatly appointed predestinations and shocking and detestable partialities on the part of the divine Father, who loved us all, and made us all ; and did that right hand ever shape anything that was hideous, worthless, beneath the condescending look of its maker ? We cannot tell what we are doing ; we do not see whose heel we are pulling ; with what angel we are wrestling ; and specially we do not know what battles we are winning by our weakness. The Pentateuch did not see the tears, but the tears were shed, and Hosea made record of them : "He wept, and made supplication unto him." We first read the words as so vigorous as to be almost defiant, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." These words might be so read as to have within them a ringing challenge, as of one who will try strength with strength, and who operates upon the limited consciousness that he is able to overthrow his antagonist in the close wrestle. It was not so ; he "wept" and "prevailed" ; he was weak, and therefore almost almighty ; he was taught if not in words, yet in consciousness to say, "When I am weak the nam I strong." The Lord will not withhold any blessing from the tears of the heart. If a man pray with tears he will get what he wants, if it is meant to enlarge his being, ennoble his spirit, and shape him to diviner uses. We do not receive things by uncivil asking, amounting almost to a note of demand. The Lord is not to be called upon as a collector calls upon a reluctant taxpayer. The Lord will answer the looks that have agony in them, tears that express all the heart, prayers tender as love. When the prodigal was broken-hearted he became a son again. So long as he had plentiful abundance, and could spread his own table, he was in a "far country" not only in a topographical, but in a sympathetic sense ; but in want and pain and helplessness, and in that cry for the father and the

home he found the beginning of a blessed eternity. Oh, soul of mine, what mightest thou have had hadst thou but wept in prayer ; hadst thou resorted to the eloquence of contrition ; hadst thou halted in thy petitions, because the throb of thy broken-heartedness prevented the utterance of words !

Here comes a majestic picture of a divine memorial ; a divine presence, a holy vision :—

“Even the Lord God of hosts ; the Lord is his memorial” (ver. 5).

The sacred name, the unique name, the incommunicable name. Thus we have always been trained in mystery ; God will have nothing that is merely superficial. We have lost everything by walking on the surface ; we were made to walk, to dip, to fly, to outrun all language, and take to the wings of fancy. Men will not have it so, and therefore they call themselves practical, sober-minded, rational, and far removed from phantasy and all things of the nature of haze and mirage. They never lead the world ; they are the heavy load that somebody else must carry, or they will never know that they have been born. The religious mind rules all. Sometimes there are interruptions of the sovereignty, but they do not impair the royalty and everlastingness of the throne. Science is now running errands for religion. Science does not know it, else it would not run. Why should we know all we are doing ? We are of yesterday, and know nothing ; to-morrow we have never seen. Presently science will make it clear that God has always been doing miracles and is always doing them, and that we ourselves are the greatest miracles of all. Do not be impatient or fretful ; the Lord is building his own house ; Bethel shall be the name of it, and its memorial shall be Jehovah. We enfeeble and impoverish ourselves by impatience. All men will come to pray. There shall one morning be such a family prayer as the world never uttered and heaven never heard ; for all men, old, young, rich, poor, grey with many days, young because just born, shall clasp their hands, and say with one consent, “Our Father, which art in heaven.” This is the vision of God ; this is the prediction not of fancy, but of reason ; and the first witness to be called in proof of its reasonableness is none other than lightning-eyed science itself. The Lord is still looking down upon the ways of Ephraim, and criticising the

action of Jacob and Judah—by which names we mean, in this exposition, all men everywhere.

The next aspect brings us flat down to the earth :—

“He is a merchant, the balances of deceit are in his hand: he loveth to oppress” (ver. 7).

That is the record written in heaven of our merchants. It is well to see ourselves as others see us on the lower and more familiar levels of life; but to know ourselves as God knows us should be an education of the amplest and most profitable kind. The world is a merchant, the balances of deceit are in his hand: he loveth to oppress; he loveth to make a bargain. Watch him how he beats the seller down; hear him as he chaffers with the poor man who has to part with his gold and silver; watch him how he goes into the house to tell his unsophisticated wife how clever he is. He hath bought a pound's worth for half a pound. To-night he will be civil in the house; the children will think he has been born again to them—a new, radiant, joyous father. “I bought a pound for half a pound!” As for the beggar he cheated, let him find a gutter where he can—it is not his business. He cannot both buy and sell. He has a record on high, he has an account to face; he cannot pay it, he cannot liquidate it; if God can do anything for him it is because he is God.

And what saith Ephraim?

“And Ephraim said, Yet I am become rich, I have found me out substance: in all my labours they shall find none iniquity in me that were sin” (ver. 8).

Literally: I am simply rich; in all my labours they shall find none iniquity that is sin. It was the custom of the trade; that is how it is. In forty pounds weight of calico put sixteen pounds weight of china clay—it is the custom of the trade: a custom more honoured in the breach than in the observance. Sell for ten yards of cloth nine yards and seven-eighths. A man likes an eighth of a lie; a little fraction of falsehood is a kind of condiment in his supper; it is the custom of the trade. And especially if a man, after doing this, can take the chair at a missionary meeting, and speak lugubriously and tediously about the condition of the heathen he has never seen, but

often cheated, he feels that there is none iniquity in him that is sin; he says, Business is business. He always says that when he wins. When he loses he says, There ought to be some morality in business after all. There is a point, you see, at which even Judas Iscariot wants an iron hand to hold some coin; it is so hot, so penetrating, so bloodsucking.

So the chapter rolls on in eloquent symbolism. We pause at a point that is satirical, yet most tragical and melancholy:

“Is there iniquity in Gilead? surely they are vanity: they sacrifice bullocks in Gilgal; yea, their altars are as heaps in the furrows of the fields” (ver. 11).

The question is, “Is there iniquity in Gilead?” There should be balm there; there should be a physician there. Is there iniquity in fair Gilead? Is it possible that in the land of whiteness there is an infinite blackness as of great darkness? Is there iniquity in Gilead, in the fairest parts of life, in the loveliest fields of existence, in infantile hearts, in tender souls, in sacred homes, in churches high in reputation? Is there iniquity in Gilead? The answer is, There is nothing but iniquity. The question was asked that the answer might be made the more emphatic, the more tremendous.

PRAYER.

FATHER of us all, thou hast in thy great mercy brought us back from the image and aspect of death, and given unto us the light and the beauty, the joy, the hope of another day. All the days are God's gifts; thou dost mean us to use them well, and bring them back to thee as talents that have been doubled. Thou hast not only given us the day, thou hast given us the strength and the grace needful to make the most of thy blessed treasure; help us to work out our calling, to do our duty, to fulfil all our task, and to go through all our work, not in a spirit of servility, but with the buoyancy and gladness and gratitude of love; then shall our work be light, our trials then shall not be without sweetness, the cross we have to bear will be borne from on high, and only the shadow of it will rest upon our shoulders. Make the day a new opportunity for doing good, for getting wisdom, for growing in grace, for helping those who need to be helped, and thus shall the day be one blessing, a door opening into heaven, and shall give us pledge and assurance of the life that shall never end. May we scorn all meanness, and lift up our heads unto the Lord as men who have a great expectation. Our hope is in the living God; thou wilt not allow our life to wander into darkness; if for a small moment we are forsaken we shall be gathered with ineffable and everlasting mercies. In the confidence of thy presence, in the assurance of thy sustaining grace, we look steadfastly to heaven, and then we look hopefully to earth, and we know that, having begun the day with prayer and praise and pious expectancy, its hours shall all be gladdened and its eventide shall be a benediction. Guide us with thine eye; sustain us by thy mighty power; keep us this day without sin. Our prayer we pray at the Cross, the eternal altar, the appointed mercy-seat; there no man can with the heart pray in vain. God be merciful unto us sinners; Christ redeem us day by day; Son of God, put forth towards us an arm that signifies the exercise of almightiness: then shall we be confident and joyous, and we shall enjoy the consciousness that our sin is pardoned. Thou delightest to forgive, thou dost abundantly pardon; thou dost not grudge thy forgiveness, but with infinite redundance of love thou dost grant us pardon as if in billow upon billow. For all thy care and love, thy light and blessing, thy nearness and tenderness, how shall the children of men praise thee? They want all the help of nature to lift their song to its right level; they would call upon thunder and sea and great wind to assist them in the uplifting of their praise to the Most High. Thou dost bless all men impartially; thou dost not forsake the work of thine own hands: old men and little children thou dost bless; the strong, the valorous, the sick, the timid thou dost not forget; thou rememberest our frame, and according to

our strength or our weakness thou dost command thy blessing to rest upon us. Great is the Lord in goodness, great is the Lord in power, but greater in tenderness. Behold, the majesty of the Lord is not in omnipotence and thunder and lightning, but in love and pity and tears and redeeming compassion: herein is the divine majesty, herein the eternal royalty. Grant unto us such a view of life as shall enable us to seize every moment with eagerness, and make the most of the opportunity it affords; take away from us the spirit of indolence, the spirit of self-indulgence and of love of ease, and inspire all thy children with courage and determination and enthusiasm, that they may work while it is called day, and serve the Lord with the obedience and diligence of love. Have pity upon the sons of men; they are of yesterday and know nothing; they have filled up their moments with heart wandering, and with sins of thought and sins of deed; but where sin abounds, grace doth much more abound; over all the sea of our iniquity there arises the Cross of Christ. Help us to be better, and to do better; fill us with the Holy Spirit; may we be the living temples of the living God; and growing in heavenly wisdom, we shall handle the affairs of earth more capably and successfully; fixing our minds upon the heavenly life, we shall the better do the duties of the passing day. Our citizenship is in heaven, yet have we a task to do upon the earth this day. To the sick, the sorrowful, the weary, the brokenhearted, send messages of love; let all men see the Cross, understand the purpose of God in the Cross of Christ; then the night shall be full of stars, and the daybreak shall be the beginning of heaven. God's will be done; God's peace dwell in our hearts, the Spirit of the living God be within us—a great inspiration, a continual comfort, a blessing that the world cannot take away. Hear us now, and always hear us, in the Name that is above every name, without which no man can be saved. Amen.

Chapter xiii.

MORNING CLOUD AND EARLY DEW.

“When Ephraim spake trembling, he exalted himself in Israel; but when he offended in Baal, he died” (ver. 1).

IT would be pleasant to read these words in the obvious sense which they bear, but that sense is not the right one. Ephraim never “spake trembling,” in any sense that indicated upon his part humility, diffidence, unworthiness. Ephraim was always proud, and therefore always cowardly; always boastful, and therefore never better than a bully. What blessing he had was given to him through heredity, and not through any personal desert. “When Ephraim spake trembling,”—when he gave Israel a sense of his awe, his military grandeur, his personal pomp, his wonderful influence, “he exalted himself in Israel;” that is to say, he made almost a god of himself; he lifted himself up to

his full stature, he rose amongst his brethren, as it were, toweringly, and cast upon them a very long and very sobering shadow. It is the portrait of one who does not know the measure of human strength, how little it is; it is the action of one who has not sounded the little depths of human wisdom and human power and human dignity. Ephraim altogether played the fool in Israel. There is another sense in which the passage has been mistakenly regarded that is full of suggestion, and pregnant with real encouragement and comfort. Annotators have not hesitated to collect around this verse others which they have thought to be of kindred import, such as, "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted." "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." "When thou wast little in thine own sight . . . the Lord anointed thee king." "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall." These citations have been thought to be worthy company for these historical incidents; they need not be dismissed from the incident, but they must not be regarded as still further elaborating and expressing its intent. Let them remain as a foil. So regarded, they are of infinite importance. No man who exalts himself in any mean way shall ever rise to enduring influence; but there is an exaltation that is heroic, sublime, made necessary by all the fitness of things—a declaration of power and a claim to attention, arising out of ministries numerous and unnameable that seem to constitute a definite and inevitable divine election. It is always difficult for some minds to distinguish between vanity and greatness, conceit and divinely-given consciousness of power. If a man should say he has no power when he knows he is able, he is not humble, he is false; when a man says he cannot contribute when all his treasury is full, he is not representing the spirit of poverty, he is representing the spirit of falsehood and ingratitude.

"And now they sin more and more, and have made them molten images of their silver, and idols according to their own understanding, all of it the work of the craftsmen" (ver. 2).

The emphasis there is where you would not expect it to be; it is upon the words "all of it." There is not one sacred spot in any idol; there is not one faint signature of the living God upon anything that man has made with his own hands to worship; it

is as if eyes of fire had searched the idols through and through, and as if the hands of critics had written their record and reported in these words : The idol is all base, all dross, all material ; all of it is the work of the hands of craftsmen. Men cannot step from the finite to the infinite. A finite creature cannot make an infinite idol. Whatever is made is less than the maker. If a man has made a god, he is greater than the god he has made. To have genius and power to make it is to have another genius and power equal to condemn it. Men get tired of what they have made. Ambition may arise and say, Make a better ; then comes the displacement of the former god, amid every sign and token of contempt. These words should be cried out poignantly, bitterly, sarcastically. A man is standing before the idol, and he has gone through it atom by atom, so to speak, lineament by lineament, and he says at the end—"all of it" : There is not one speck of heavenly gold in all this handful of earthly rubbish. "They say of them, Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves." It was said in Israel concerning the calves, "These be thy gods, O Israel." To kiss was in the ancient times a sign of homage either human or divine. Men kissed their gods. When they could not kiss their gods, as, for example, in the instance of the heavenly bodies, they kissed their fingers, and waved their kissed hands to the objects of worship. The divine Being does not hesitate to accept this action, and give it its highest meaning ; hence in the second Psalm there is one who says, "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way." That man should have descended to kiss a god of his own making is the consummation of weakness, and the very climax of ignorance and blasphemy. All this happened in ancient times. That is true, but all this happens letter for letter to-day. Man cannot get beyond the tether of his race. It is man that is tethered ; not a man, some man, a particular and dying man, but humanity. We are all in one condemnation ; the act of homage has not ceased, the object of desire may have changed. Men live in circumstances, and are lost in details, and therefore it is probable that they may imagine if they have substituted some other object for the calves of Israel therefore they have left the old idolatry. That is not so. If a man be trusting to his own right arm he is as great an idolater as any that ever lived in Israel. Whoso

says he has money enough to keep out the difficulties of time, the slaves of want, and therefore he need not concern himself with providence in any spiritual and metaphysical sense, is as much an idolater as he who in uncivilised lands bows down to stock or stone, or lifts eyes of wondering ignorance to the blue heavens that he may fix them upon something of which he will make the image of a god.

Yet all these heathen practices admit of the highest applications. Let no man reject nature, it is God's handiwork ; no craftsman made the sun ; no hireling servant set the stars in their places. If any poor heart, ill at ease, should pick out some fair-faced star and say, Be thou god to me, it might be the beginning of the higher religion, the nobler and truer faith. These are mysteries, and are not to be spoken about scornfully. He does not know the human heart who says to men who know no better, that idolatry is a sin. It was a sin in Israel, because it involved backsliding from the true God ; but find a man in a savage land who has never heard of God or Christ, and to whom the words father, mother, brother, sister, carry no dew of blessing, no colour of poetry, no suggestion of wider and eternal fellowships, —find a man there clinging to but a handful of mud in the expectation that there is something in it that can help him, and it is no sin : it should be the business of those who know better to teach him better ; let what he has seized be the alphabet out of which to make words and music and wisdom. Sometimes men are prone to say that a Christian country is no better than a heathen land because the Christians of the country have abandoned their Christianity. That is not fair to heathen lands. Any man who has been a Christian, and has left his Christianity, or defiled his faith, is infinitely worse than any pagan who never heard of the Cross. No pagan can be so bad as an apostate Christian.

The prophet proceeds to poetry, and yet under his poetry there is a line of practical wisdom and monition :—

“Therefore they shall be as the morning cloud, and as the early dew that passeth away” (ver. 3).

That is beautiful,—“morning cloud” : why, that may be a robe of glory ; it may be a treasure-house into which the sun has trans-

ferred all manner of rich colour and tender suggestion of brighter mornings than ever dawned upon the earth. "Early dew,"—jewels from the womb of the morning, benisons from heaven's smile, gifts of God, liquid flowers. Oh, who shall tell what early dew means? This is the divine aspect of the symbolism. There is nothing wrong in morning cloud, or in early dew, but if the flowers do not receive immediate benefit from that dew they cannot receive permanent advantage; the dew will go as soon as it sees the sun. The dew is as one waiting for the morning to come out in full smile, and then it will claim kindred, and pass away to be merged into cloud and rainbow and wizardry of summer skies. So upon our youth there may have been signs of beauty; yet because we did not turn those signs to spiritual utility, they have passed away, and that which was once baptised with dew is as arid and barren sand. But there are two sets of figures in this verse; here is a quartette of symbolism: morning cloud and early dew on the one side; on the other, chaff that is driven with the whirlwind out of the floor, and as the smoke out of the chimney. Let these figures stand in mutual illustration, in forcible solemn contrast: on the one side morning cloud, early dew; on the other chaff, and smoke out of the chimney. Is the smoke out of the chimney to be described as a morning cloud? See, it becomes blacker and blacker; there is no suggestion of beauty in it, there is no fragrance in that incense; it is smoke only, worthless, without beauty, without utility; let it be blown away by the wind. And the chaff, who will run after it? Who is miserly enough to rise early that he may save the chaff from the contempt of the wind? In this poetry there is stern reason; in this imagery there is highest righteousness. God will distinguish between the morning cloud and the smoke out of the chimney, the early dew which no hand but his own could mould, and the chaff out of which the wheat has been taken, and that the wind, yea, the whirlwind, may play with as it pleases, for it can lose nothing. These are indications of character, these are etchings of life. There is infinitely more in these figures than mere symbolism. Who has not seen the morning cloud in a child? It was a cloud, but a morning cloud, edged with light, filled with possible glory; quite an evanescent thing, yet suggestive of real beauty, of vital worthfulness. Who has not seen the

early dew in the young life, all beauty, all tenderness, all hopefulness? And who could distinguish between the flower and the dew—which was the dew, which was the flower? How beautiful they both are, and how they belong to one another! And who can tell what is coming out of that sacred union? And yet the morning cloud has disappointed the parent, and the early dew has not left any blessed memory for the pastor. Who does not know the chaff, and who has not seen the smoke? The chaff cannot long pass as wheat; its true quality will soon be discovered. Smoke is not to be mistaken for incense of the true and acceptable kind. How many men there are who have no substance, no reality. What beauty they may have is a borrowed beauty; it is shed upon them, it does not flash out of them; it is an accident, not an expression of nature: “Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.”

“I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought” (ver. 5).

God knows his people where nobody else will take any notice of them. You do not know a man until you know him in the wilderness. There is but little revelation of character in laughter. So long as a man is living in rioting and wantonness, in great abundance and prosperity, having only to lift his hand to command a regiment of servants, you cannot really tell what his true quality is. Men show themselves in the darkness; men cry out of their hearts when they are in distress; it is in the night time of life's bitter sorrows that men's true quality is revealed. God never forsakes his people in wildernesses and in desert places; he is more God and Father to them there than ever. No man knows God who only knows him theologically. It is impossible to read much about God; you must read the writing in your own heart. The world is within you; you carry the universe in your own bosom. Unless you have the faculty and the genius of introspection, and the power to read the small print that is being daily typed upon your inmost life, you can never be scholars in the sanctuary of Christ, you can never attain to high degrees of wisdom in the school of heaven. Men seek God in the wilderness. The wilderness is the school of discipline. In the Bible there lies one great desert land, and it is called “that great and terrible wilderness.” There could not be two

such in any globe ; there could not be a duplicate experience in any life. Some things can be done only once ; no man can be twice in Gethsemane ; no man can be twice crucified. There are acts in life which, having been accomplished, enable the sufferer to say, The bitterness of death is passed ; come what will now, it is but a day's march into heaven.

Now comes a stroke of satire, tremendous in its urgency and awful in the whole range of its suggestion :—

“According to their pasture, so were they filled ; they were filled, and their heart was exalted ; therefore have they forgotten me” (ver. 6).

The emphasis is upon the words “their pasture.” The figure is that of a man who has sown a field, and now must reap what he has sown—he has sown to the flesh, now he must put his sickle into corruption, for they that sow unto the flesh must of the flesh reap corruption. “Their pasture” : their way of doing things, their invented joys, their fabricated fortunes and delights and prospects ; their weaving, their sowing, their mechanism ; their pasture through and through—what does it amount to ? To hunger. The more they eat of their pasture the keener and larger their necessity. For a time they are filled as a man might fill himself with chaff ; for a time they are filled as with foam ; for a time they are filled, but it is with the exhilaration of swiftly coming madness ; for that time they forget God ; they say they can do without him. God simply leaves them to their pasture, and when they have gone into every corner of it, and eaten up every particle of chaff they can find, he simply waits and looks on. The cry of hunger will soon announce the result of grubbing in a pasture that is not rooted in the sun.

Then across all this complaining there come voices that are charged with gospel music :—

“O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself ; but in me is thine help” (ver. 9).

There is a whole evangelical revelation : self-destruction, divine redemption ; man the sinner, God the Saviour ; man lost, and God in search of him—what more is there in Gethsemane, on Calvary ?

Then comes another phase of the Gospel before the time, Paul's

great argument on resurrection sketched by the strong hand of Hosea :—

“I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction” (ver. 14).

How much higher did Paul rise? Not one step higher did apostolic genius, divinely-inspired, ascend. Here are lives ransomed, bought, paid for,—bought with blood, the price paid; here is redemption from death, a power confronted with death, and that power tearing out its teeth, extracting its sting, blinding its hideous eyes, and triumphing over it as a silent and humiliated and dishonoured opponent; and here is the old grave, the old worrying, all-devouring, all-concealing grave, torn asunder, and its victims liberated, and made into sons of light. I will be thy destruction, O grave; I will be thy plagues, O death. Put it in Christian language: O grave, where is thy sting? O death, where is thy victory? Thus the Testaments hail one another on resurrection morning. The Old Testament could not have been written but for the resurrection that is revealed in all the fulness of its meaning in the New Testament. There be those who say, Is there aught about the resurrection in the Old Testament? And there have been those who have said, Nay, it is not so much as named there, unless we take a passage in Job and one or two hints elsewhere, and amplify them into an argument. On the contrary, I find in “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” the resurrection; I find in “And God created man in his own image and likeness” the resurrection; I find in “The seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent” the death of death, and the filling up of the grave.

Chapter xiv.

AN OPEN DOOR.

ALL know what a tempest is. Perhaps all do not know the real sweep and force of a cyclone; such knowledge it is not always desirable to acquire, but being acquired, it is not easy to forget. The prophecy of Hosea has hitherto been tempest, and storm, and whirlwind, and cyclone, and great rage and tumult of all elements; but now in this closing chapter we have light, peace, comfort, gospel words, evangelical music, an easy and inviting slope right up into heaven. Judge nothing before the time. Do not judge the book by the preface; do not determine the real scope and temper of providence by occasional occurrences: wait until the voice from heaven says, It is finished, then survey the whole, and fear not to let the heart pronounce its judgment even upon the ways of God. There have been times when we expected no such conclusion as this. Sometimes we thought in reading these prophecies by Hosea that all must end in midnight, and that the objects of the divine judgment must be carried away by an infinite whirlwind, none knowing whither they have been borne; but the wind cries itself to rest, the cloudy sky outgrows its frown, and lo, at eventide there is light, and in the closing hours there is prophecy, and there is assurance of immortality. The Gospel itself has gone no further than the elements which constitute this closing chapter.

“O Israel,”—the nation addressed in its unity; all the details brought into living cohesion, and God’s gentle eyes moist with pity fixed only upon the great unit,—“return unto the Lord thy God”: come back; do not any longer pursue the way of folly and the path of darkness; turn round, be converted. What said Jesus Christ in his opening sermon that was all music; so brief, yet so elaborate; though in a word, yet filling all the volumes that

human literature could write? "Repent." That is the cry of this closing chapter: "Return," be converted, be healed, come home. That is an evangelical cry; that is the very passion and the very meaning of the Cross of Christ. Then the door is not closed; then a man need not be a fool unto the end of his life, and die a criminal; then having once set his foot upon the wrong road, there is no divine necessity, as of election or predestination, that he must go on and on until he is burned in perdition. Is it true that somewhere in life—yes, anywhere, so that the old man may have his gospel as well as the young prodigal—there is a possibility of returning? Who, having heard of that possibility, would resist its play? Who would not say, This is a divinely created opportunity; I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto him, I have sinned? "If thou hast fallen by thine iniquity." Then man is not called to come down, but to come up; thou hast fallen flat upon the earth, into the deep gully, into the immeasurable abyss, into the bottomless pit. This is a call from a fall. We are inclined to be a little timid in our use of that old theological term. We have changed the word "fall"; we have elaborated it into a polysyllable, or we have in some way, not wholly explained or justified, got rid of it. But having conjured with the word, have we parted with the solemnity and tragedy of the fact? The fall is not to be argued into a man; the fall is an experience which must be confirmed by the consciousness of the heart itself. The heart cannot speak coherently upon this question, or rest in any argument of its own invention; it dreams, and half-dreams, it plunges into the clouds and mists; then out it springs into green places where the summer seems to be lying in all welcome and hospitality of beauty and fruitfulness. The experience of the heart about this matter of the fall is a varied, conflicting, tumultuous experience. Sometimes the heart would deny it and say, I have never left the Lord; and sometimes the heart would say, I have so far left my God that to return is impossible. Here is a recognition of fallen manhood. The word is "fallen"; there is no mistake about the line of movement; it is not oblique, vertical, collateral, eccentric; it is done. To come up is the difficulty; to ascend is the miracle. There is a kind of gravitation that would seem to be against that action, for all things are tethered to an invisible

centre, and limited by lines impalpable. But the gospel delights in miracle ; delights in carrying forward nature and its actions to higher applications ; delights to find in the darkness stars which the telescope of genius never discovered.

“Take with you words.” How easy ! That is the mistake. How cheap ! That is the fatal blunder. “Take with you words” : when men are in earnest their words are themselves. We say in our homely proverb, “His word is his bond.” “Take with you words” : leave the bullock, leave the calf, leave the sacrifice, leave all ritualism and pomp and circumstance, and take with you yourselves, speech of the heart, prayer of the soul, cry of the felt necessity. We are coming quickly now upon spiritual regions ; presently we shall get rid altogether of bullock and calf and sacrifice of animal, and all the reeking flowing blood ; presently we shall come to a new seizure or method of appropriation in relation to God ; there shall be between us a Word :—In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. and the Word was God. The Word was made flesh : and man, if he were made in the image and likeness of God, would be a word, unmarred by any insincerity, unconcealed under any garb of ambiguity. Here is a call to spiritual worship. The Lord is tired of all the offerings which have been placed upon his altar ; he cannot away with them, but when the heart speaks to him he will listen ; that will be a new order of service. Now we shall come to whispered penitence and whispered love ; to a suppressed cry of weakness ; then to a louder cry of hope ; then to a shout of thanksgiving ; then to a storm of triumph. Here we come upon a new era : God is a Spirit : and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. The Old Testament here unloads itself, and is prepared to introduce us to an era in which there shall be spiritual perception, spiritual communion, the voice of words tenderer than love, more eloquent than music. What words shall be spoken ? Is any hint given of the new speech ? It is written here in plain letters, but never can be written in all its meaning : “say unto him,”—Lord teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples. Here is the Lord before John, through the medium of a prophet, teaching us a prayer. What shall we say ? Here is your speech : “Take away all iniquity, and receive

us graciously"—do us good. "Take away all iniquity"—here is confession. "Take away all iniquity"—here is a consciousness that God only can do it. We can commit the sin, but cannot pardon it; we can do the evil, but cannot expunge it; we can incur the burden, we cannot discharge the responsibility. "And receive us graciously": receive us into grace, into favour, yea, do us good; restore us wholly, as a dislocated joint may be put back into its place again. That is all petition. Are words to be limited to request? is there to be nothing in prayer but this monotonous asking?

The answer we find in the latter part of the second verse: "So will we render the calves of our lips": our sacrifice shall be a living sacrifice; we have nothing to slay; we will live unto the Lord. The "lips" here stand for life; the "calves" must be regarded as representing symbolically the old sacrifice in a new form,—not the unintelligent and irresponsive calves of the meadow, but the calves of our lips, the living sacrifice, the personal offering. What a prayer, thus modelled and outlined! Here is confession, here is hope, here is poetry, here is consecration, here is communion with God: yet is there no bargain-making. Man is not inviting God to enter into a covenant in which there shall be so much for so much. Forgive us, and we will obey. Pardon us, and reckon then upon our worship;—the worship does not come as a payment, but as a necessity of nature; it will be the utterance of gratitude; it represents the irrepressible music of spiritual thanksgiving. When the prophet says, "Take with you words," he has often been misunderstood. Some have thought that this is an authority for using forms of prayer; so quick, yet so blind, is the exegetical ingenuity of unqualified expositors. "Take with you words" has been regarded as an instance that we have only to utter a certain description of pious words, and all will be well. The term here signifies heart, life, truth, sincerity, and independence of all ritual, an interview with God. Do not amend these conditions. We cannot surprise God by the magnificence of our offering; we must surprise ourselves by the magnificence of poverty. We must be led to see that there is nothing in grandeur, and that all grandeur is in simplicity. The most difficult lesson for man to learn at a certain point in his spiritual

education is that he is doing everything by doing nothing ; that he is praying most when he is saying least ; that he is moving all heaven not by the might of his intellect, but by the weakness of his tears. How can we take with us words ? Only by taking with us the Word—the Word that was made flesh, and that dwelt with man. We are not invited to go alone to God ; there is no way spoken of now by which a man shall go unaccompanied to face his Creator ; we go in the name of Christ, in the company of Christ. We have a meeting-place, and there is none other, and the name of that meeting-place is the Cross.

But can Israel so pray and so promise, and then repeat yesterday as if nothing had occurred in the night time of penitence ? No ; this is a miracle not permitted by the Lord. Israel must be complete in confession and complete in renunciation. That completeness of renunciation we find in the following words :—

“Asshur shall not save us ; we will not ride upon horses : neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods” (ver. 3).

It comes to this, that a man must at some point say Good-bye to his old ruined self. There were cleansing days in the moral life—days when Assyria must be warned away as a helper that is helpless, as only a name of pride without being an arm of power. Asshur must go. “We will not ride upon horses” : the stables must be cleansed. The horse has always in ancient history, as given in the Old Testament, been regarded as an emblem of pride. Israel at one period bought horses ; Solomon committed the folly of having a boundless stable, he would have horses like the Egyptians. The Lord will not have anything to do with such horses in such relations. Men must ride upon his almightiness, and not upon the bared back of some steed of the wilderness ; though he fly with the wind, and tear up the desert in the passion of his urgency, it is running itself to death

“Neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods.” Here is the day of good-bye, life-cleansing, a renewal that is complete, all old companionships dismissed, old habitudes given up, the Ethiopian’s skin torn away, the spots of the leper taken out by some divine action. “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature : old things are passed away ; behold,

all things are become new": old trusts, old superstitions, old hopes, old sacrifices, all old things have gone, and life enjoys a newness that is not without a touch of the venerableness of eternity; not a paltry superficial newness as of polish just put on, but a newness that connects itself with eternal origins, with eternal springs. This is the mystery of the gospel, this is the mystery of grace, that a man shall grow newer as he grows older; he shall become younger with the flying years, he shall use time as a ladder by which he scales the ramparts of eternity. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and his Church; this is a mystery only to the dense understanding that has never felt the splendour and the warmth of the new morning.

We now come upon words never excelled by John or by Paul for sweep of thought and tenderness of pathos:—

"I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him" (ver. 4).

"I will love them freely" is an expression which literally means, I am impelled to love them; some old memory is awakened, some long-disused energy comes into play, considerations that have fallen into desuetude arise, awaken, and operate, and I the Eternal am impelled to love the returning prodigal. Here is another profound mystery; when God meets man it is on both sides as the result of an impulsion not to be fully described in words. They know one another, they have been seeking one another; across the darkness of the foulest apostasy there have shot occasional gleams as if from the lamp that made the old home bright with love; in the revel of midnight, in the debauch of darkness, there have been heard broken tones as of a voice that once filled the soul with ineffable music. When God sees the returned prodigal he sees more than the sin—he sees the sinner within the sin, the man within the sinner, the God within the man; old memories, so to say—for we must use a language that will accommodate itself to human conceptions—are aroused on both sides, and when the sinner and the offended Father meet it is by impulsion, constraint; it is a recognition of the fitness of things, a restoration of suspended harmonies; it is in very deed, in apostolic language, a "reconciliation."

Now the Lord will betake himself to poetry. To what else could he betake himself? He is all sublimity; his tears are jewels; his words are eternities; his glance is the glory that lights up the universe—"I will be as the dew unto Israel." It would seem as if the Lord had something to make up to the sinner. This is the view which he always takes of the case of repentance; no sooner does the prodigal return than he seems to say, What can I do for him? Bring forth the best robe, the ring, the fatted calf, and instrument of music: let it be heard in vibrant sound or in tender winsomeness of tone: for my son was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found. "I will be as the dew unto Israel,"—a great beauty, but nothing to carry in the way of burdensomeness. What flower ever said, O thou Maker of flowers, this dewdrop is too heavy a load for my poor strength to carry? An infinite jewellery, but quite unburdensome, without one touch of oppression. "He shall grow as the lily,"—an image referring to the pureness of God himself. The lily was a flower of dazzling whiteness, the very summation of all colour, caught in a velocity which reconciled and united the colours in one brilliant white. But the lily may be cut down: does the figure terminate with frailty and evanescence? No; for the Lord says, "and cast forth his roots as Lebanon." The roots shall be as long as the branches. The Chinese proverb is, that when a tree has been blown down it shows that the branches have been longer than the roots. This is not the case with those who really live and move and have their being in God. Measure the branch, that is the length of the root; measure the root, that is the length of the branch; to get at the branch you must get at the root. Blessed be God, the figure was never amended but by him who originated it; said he, "I am the Vine, ye are the branches: as the branch cannot bear fruit in itself, no more can ye, except ye abide in me." So that we are no longer either branch or root independently, but we are a branch in a living Vine, and if we have aught of root that root is hidden in the infinity and sovereignty of God.

"I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon" (vers. 5, 6).

And so the wind around him shall be odoriferous. Let your light

so shine before men, that they may know your Father ; let your fragrance be as the odour of many choice spices that men may know ye belong to the garden of the Lord. Do not have a limited piety. All the little flowers in the well-concealed garden are struggling to get out. Some men—how dare they live?—wall their gardens round, and there is not a violet in the estate that is not trying to escape ; the little thing is saying, I can't get over that wall, but I can send a kiss over it to some little child that may happen to be chalking the wall on the other side. Children will chalk walls as long as there are walls to be chalked. And every little rose is saying, This is too small a place for me ; I can't get out, but I will breathe a benediction, and perhaps some poor o'er-laboured wight, some burden-carrying old woman, may get a waft of the fragrance, and know that there is a garden on this side the wall. The Church is to be fragrant ; the Church is to make itself known. There is no violence here, but the tender violence of love, the aggression of a pity that would save the world.

“ Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols ? ” (ver. 8.)

Ephraim has seen his folly ; Ephraim has sounded the depths of superstition ; Ephraim does not give up his idols without a reason. He says, I have tried you, and you are vain ; I have leaned upon you, and you are broken staves ; I have consulted you, and you had no answer ; I have looked to you, but you never turned a kind eye upon me. The great apostle says, “ Little children, keep yourselves from idols ” ; the old Scotch version says, “ Wee bairns, keep yourselves frae dolls ” : the meaning is the same. I like the quaintness of the Scotch version. There is a caressing tenderness in that gruff old tone ; listen to it ; it is the kind of tone that grows upon the heart ; at first it is very singular, and not wholly desirable, but there is in it a latent music ; if you say the words over and over again, you will come to like them. The time is on the surface ; open it, and you find eternity.

JOEL.

[NOTE.—“We have no account in the Bible of the personal history of Joel, nor does tradition give much light in relation to him. He was the son of Pethuel (Joel i. 1), and, it is said, of the tribe of Reuben. It is inferred from his writings that he lived in Judah, probably not later than the reign of Uzziah, which extended from 810 B.C. to 758 B.C.; for when he mentions the enemies of his country, he names the Phœnicians, Philistines, Idumeans, and Egyptians (chap. iii. 4-19), but makes no reference to the Assyrians and Babylonians, which he probably would have done had those two empires been already formidable to the Jews. The whole book indicates, moreover, that the prophet lived at a time when the people of Judah had not fallen into that extreme depravity which, in later times, drew down upon them such heavy chastisements. Uzziah had indeed begun to lift up his heart (2 Chron. xxvi. 16); but the evil seems as yet rather a subject of prophecy than of history, though given in historical form. He was contemporary with Hosea and Amos; and as they addressed *Israel*, so he addressed *Judah*. His style is remarkably clear and elegant; obscure only towards the close, where its beauties are shaded by allusions to events not yet accomplished. The double destruction foretold in chaps. i., ii., xi., the first by the locusts, the second by the enemies of whom they were harbingers, is painted in terms that are reciprocally metaphorical, and admirably adapted to the two-fold character of the description. Joel was held in great reverence by the ancient Jews, and is quoted by both Peter and Paul (Acts ii., Rom. x. 13).”—ANGUS'S *Bible Handbook*.]

Chapter i.

PROPHET OF JUDGMENT.

JOEL wrote his prophecy eight hundred years before Jesus Christ came into the world. It is a prophecy of judgment. If we liken ourselves to travellers through this Bible land we shall feel that we have come suddenly upon a volcano. “Joel” is a word which means, The Lord is God; “Pethuel” is a word which means, Persuaded of God. Names were characters in the olden time; now they are mere lines in a directory. Men were souls in Bible times; to-day they are “hands.” We know

nothing of Joel. He comes as suddenly and tearingly into the history as did Elijah. His father's name is given, but there was no need to give it, for nobody ever heard of it; it is an unknown name, and therefore it stands for nothing in the history. It is well for a man now and then to come who has no father, no mother, no ancestry, no relations that can be traced in so many genealogical lines; a man who stands out in his own personality, and is all or is nothing according to what he himself can be and say and do. Such a man is Joel; he has lips of fire, he has jaws of iron, he has a throat of brass; a fearless, resolute, denunciatory man, with a gift of righteous damnation.

"The word of the Lord that came to Joel" (ver. 1).

Not the word that came to Hosea or to Amos, but the word that came to Joel,—intimating that there is a word that comes to every man. "The gospel according to Matthew,"—not the gospel according to John. Matthew could not write with John's pen; John probably scarcely had patience to read what Matthew had written. They were men of a different spiritual genius, their gifts were contrastive; yet each man told what he saw of the Life, the Truth, the Way. It was the gospel according to—— then must be filled in all that is personal, temperamental, educational, experimental, so that every man shall tell his own tale, preach his own gospel. The apostle was not ashamed to say "my gospel,"—old, yet new; coming from eternity, yet accepting the accent of individuality. Each man has his own view of God, his own kingdom of heaven, his own way of telling what God has done for him; and the mischief is that we expect every man to speak in the same tone, to deliver the same words, and to subject himself to the same literary yoke or spiritual discipline. The Bible sets itself against all this monotony. Every man must speak the word that God has given to him through the instrumentality of his own characteristics. But we have judges who say they know what they hear. They are not judges of themselves. We cannot hear all the truth until we have heard all the truth-speakers; we cannot know man until we know humanity; we must know the all before we can know the part. So the Bible is not to be read in patches and portions, but is to be read in its entirety, until part allies itself to part, and strain

follows strain, the whole constituting one massive structure, or, changing the figure, one noble song.

A man cannot say what word has to come to him. A man cannot be both the message carrier and the message originator. We are errand-runners; we have to receive our message and repeat it; we have not first to create it, then to modify it, then to deliver it. The prophets assumed the position of being instruments, mediums for communications which the Lord wished to make with his children near and far, and with the world at large and through all time. Many of the prophets could not have chosen to say what they did; their message burned their lips, their tongues were scorched with the hard hot words the Lord gave them to utter; but they could not forbear, they must be faithful; every word that was told them in secret they had to proclaim on the housetop of history. A man cannot say he will sing his gospel; the Lord has only sent a certain number of singers, and we cannot increase the multitude. No man can say, I will go forth and thunder the word of the Lord in the ear of the age; the Lord hath not given his thunder to that tongue; it was meant to speak peacefully, soothingly, kindly, and when it tries to thunder creation would smile at the feebleness of the effort and the palpableness of the irony. So we have in the Bible all kinds of ministry. There are thunders and judgments in the book, and there are voices like lutes; there are whispers which you can only hear when you incline your ear with all the intensity of attention. There are words that roll down the mountains like splintered rocks, granites that have been ripped in two by the lightning; and there are words that fall from another mountain as flowers, beatitudes, tender speeches: "Ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire; ye are come unto Mount Zion,"—the green mount, the pastoral hill, where God's beauty smiles in God's own sunlight. But do not let one prophet criticise another, and declare that he is not in the prophetic office, because he does not speak in this man's tone. Criticism is folly and injustice when it would make all men talk alike and be alike; let the Lord have some space in his own universe, let him have some rights in his own household. We have no voice in our own official election,

One man cannot be like another man, though he may desire very much to be like some other teacher. When Joel hears David sing, would he not gladly throw away his judgment burden and ask the old minstrel for a harp, that he might accompany him in the utterance of his pleading, pleasing, grateful strain of thanksgiving and of joy? But men cannot change places.

The Lord hath need of all kinds of men; he wants the fire and the whirlwind and the tempest, and the dew, and the still small voice—all are God's ministry, God's husbandry. When will the blue morning dawn, day of justice and of peace and love, when one man shall recognise another man's divers gifts as being as certainly in the prophetic office as himself? When that day dawns prophecy will have expired, for there will be nothing to predict; the millennium will have dawned, and heaven and earth blended in one harmonic identity. There are others who are sent into the world to upbraid it. It is presumably providential that there should be some upbraiding voices; perhaps it is presumably providential that some of us have an intense dislike for the ministry of upbraiding. When Christ upbraids there is justice and not spitefulness in his noble accusations; when other men upbraid they are apt, under the tone of upbraiding, subtly to conceal somewhat of their own excellence, as who should say, I never could have done it; such an action could by no possibility have been done by these fingers—why did you do it? I told you how it would be. How did you come to run your neck into that noose? How was it that you went contrary to my advice? Did I not tell you? Oh, cruel tongue! That will never help a man; you never won a man by scourging him so. Do not remind him of what you, magnificent nobody, told him,—it was not worth remembering; if the thing itself was good it was borrowed, and being borrowed, it was spoiled in the delivery. If you can say anything to encourage the man, to give him a new view of his circumstances, to inspire him to call up all his fading strength, say it. An upbraiding tongue will turn a palace into a hovel; an upbraiding tongue can never sing God's music; an upbraiding ministry that is not instantly followed with healing, encouragement, inspiration, and ennobling assurance, is the worst of cruelty, because it adds to its own venom the hypocrisy of

counterfeited religion. We need ministries of denunciation ; we have too few such ministries. Society is an organised hypocrisy. The denouncer speaks inwardly, swallowing his own denunciations, and trying to look benignant where he ought to look like a thundercloud. Society was never so corrupt as at this day. Joel knew nothing about corruptness. Eight hundred years before Christ it was impossible for men to be as bad as they could be after the Cross had been set up ; from the date of Calvary all things changed their relations : that which was formerly venial became henceforth iniquitous, double-dyed in all evil ; that which before appeared to be great afterwards appeared to be comparatively small : so all relations underwent modification. No man can be so bad as a good man ; no heart can be so cruel as the gentlest heart when it is turned in a wrong direction, poisoned and soured and stung into unwonted animosities. A Christian not faithful to his Christianity is worse than any pagan ever had it in his power to be. What can stand before the blasphemy of trampling under foot the blood of the everlasting covenant ? It lies within the power of men who live in Christian days to be the worst men that ever lived.

“Hear this, ye old men, and give ear, all ye inhabitants of the land. Hath this been in your days, or even in the days of your fathers ?” (ver. 2.)

The prophets will attend to history ; they will not have little or narrow views taken of providence. They summon councils of the old and the young and the many-minded, and they say, How stands this fact in the history of the ages ? Fixing our minds upon locality, we miss the universe. It is possible for a man to be so devoted a geographer as not to know there is any other world but the earth in all the shining heavens. A man may so belittle himself by his geography as to lose all right to give a judgment on the providence of the universe. We do not understand one age until we have called in all the ages. To-day is the product of all the days. This is the advantage of studying history on large lines ; this is the advantage of the true university course, that takes in all points, all influences, all factors ; this is the education that attempers the mind, gives it a new judicial quality, enables it to be cool where minds that have not undergone the discipline fly off into little spasms and sparks of anger

and retaliation, not knowing how one thing blends with another, and how all things work together in holy edification. So Joel will have a large council, not the young men only, for they can talk but little wisdom; and not any one class, for they only know what belongs to their own relationship; he will have old and young, he will have experience and passion, he will have sobriety and enthusiasm, and he will constitute the whole into judgment.

"Tell ye your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation. [And what is to be told? This:] That which the palmerworm hath left hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left hath the cankerworm eaten; and that which the cankerworm hath left hath the caterpillar eaten" (vers. 3, 4).

God hath many locusts. Only four of them are named here, but they are the greatest devourers that ever fell upon a landscape. They came but an hour ago; they are multitudinous beyond the power of arithmetic to enumerate, and in a few hours not one green thing will be left upon the land. Nay, their jaws are like stones, they will seize the bark upon the trees and tear it off, and none can hear the crunching of that gluttony; and to-morrow what will the fair landscape be like? It will be like a country smitten by sudden winter; the trees that yesterday were green and fair and lovely will be naked, and their whiteness shall resemble the whiteness of snow. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." All the fourfold locust tribe—for all mentioned here are locusts—belong to the Lord. The great providence of God is responsible for its own acts. Man needs to be severely humbled; it does not always suffice simply to bend him a little; sometimes he must be doubled and thrown down as out of a scornful hand—not that he may be destroyed, but that he may be brought to himself. Soldiers with their sabres and bayonets cannot turn back the beetle. The Lord hath made some things so small that no bayonet can strike them; yet how they bite, how they devour, how they consume, how they plague the air, how they kill kings and make nations weak, and turn armies white with panic! It is easy for philosophers who live in highly-rented premises to tell men that all these things are not to be accounted for; whereas if a locust could alight upon the head of one of these wonderful philosophers, all

his philosophy would not suffice to reconcile him to the painful event. There are no cowards so blatant, so pitiable, as those who say in sunshine, There is no God, and all things have been as they are from the beginning, and do not disturb. Let some insect fasten upon the face of these patterers of words that have no juice or wine or music in them, and they will run away from their own sermon, and beg to be forgiven for having committed the folly of philosophy. We must deal with facts. Joel knew what he was talking about, and could point to the landscape: The locusts came to this place, devoured these grapes, left their signature of death upon these fair fig-trees. We can all refer to similar events. There are parts of our life we dare not look into more than a moment. There were times when our bread was taken out of our hand whilst yet it was within reach of the lips of hunger. There have been times when our windows have suddenly been darkened: men told us it was dyspepsia, it was an affection of the liver, it was the weather, it was anything but judgment. Blessed are they who can handle all so-called accidents skilfully, and talk of liver and weather and disorder and passing ailments with all the eloquence that is due to such trifles. Blessed still are they, and more, who can believe that nothing happens that has not in it a moral signification, that every touch unfamiliar is a call to attention, because the Lord is going to give testimony to the soul. Rich is that man who finds in his loss a new occasion of praise; great and princely he who recognises in every passing cloud that he is not the master, but the Lord reigneth, and the Lord must manage the affairs of his own household.

“Awake, ye drunkards, and weep” (ver. 5).

Why? The reference need not be specifically and exclusively to wine, though that word is mentioned here; the reference is no doubt to wine and to all narcotics and to all the base alternatives of which corrupt men avail themselves in the time of peril and distress; but the eternal lesson of the exhortation is that all sin ends in stupefaction. “Awake.” Are not drunkards always awake? No; they never can be awake in the full sense of the term. Are not all bad men awake, on the *qui vive*, on the alert? Are they not watchful, keen-eyed, lynx-eyed? No; they may boast of being

such, but all bad men are stupefied ; there is an alcohol working upon them which takes out the brain force and the nerve power, and leaves them feeble indeed. Though under some vain hallucination they may believe themselves to be sane, when the mocking spirit of judgment has drawn a film across their eyes, and made them see a mirage when they thought they saw a mountain on which was spread a feast of fat things. All evil stupefies, all wrong-doing takes away brain volume, brain force. Every evil thought robs the mind ; every cruel passion that surges through the blood steals not the purse, but that without which the purse is empty. "He that sinneth against me," saith Wisdom, saith the Lord indeed, "wrongeth his own soul." Suicide is not limited to one act or to one species of madness. A man cannot plot an evil conspiracy without being less a man afterwards than he was before. No brain can bear the action of sin without going down in quality, in fire, in fine delicacy, in gift of prayer. He who sins much prays little ; he who gives himself up to the captivity of the devil cares not to look aloft and face the upbraiding stars. All through these grand prophetic books men are called to awake, rouse themselves, shake off their lethargy, and be men in attention and in consecration.

We need a Joel to-day. * For his wages we would award him starvation. He would not live in kings' houses. There is nothing to-day in Church or state that does not need pulling to pieces, cross-examination, analysis, that all that is good therein—and there is much good—may be brought into new cohesion, and set to new and fuller uses. Men are bribing men, and then going to the Sunday school ; many are saying, If you will get this property on these terms through my hands it will be on the understanding that—— And the all but silent reply is, That will, of course, be understood. And then they go to church ! They say, This is public property, and is not like private property ; and if I can arrange this for you, the commission will be—— You understand what I mean ; and then they go to some Liberal meeting and shout, "The people for ever !" or to some Tory meeting, and say, "Church and Queen !" If some Joel were to come he would be starved—he must be starved. No one ever came to do Messianic work who was not nailed and pierced and crucified.

It is in vain to preach peace until we have first preached repentance ; it is mischievous to say, Peace, peace, where there is no peace ; it is iniquity in the sight of God to daub the wall with untempered mortar. Nothing is settled until it is settled at the foundations. A painted cheek is not a healthy one ; the true colour must come up from the heart, and write itself in healthy hue on the face. Having preached repentance, we can then preach peace—we ought to preach peace. This was the method of Jesus Christ. He began to preach by saying, “Repent” ; after that came all the sweet gospel of offered love, of sacrifice, of pure doctrine, of noble life, and then came the wondrous mystery of the Cross—Christ being delivered because of our offences, and raised again because of our justification : the mystery of the Atonement, the mystery of Calvary, the ineffable mystery of the Just dying for the unjust, that men might be saved. But first there must be Joel-like denunciation, criticism, exposure, and afterwards there shall come all that Christ has to say, Peace on earth, goodwill toward men—all that Christ can do by way of reconciliation ; and until Christ has undertaken the case we undertake it in vain. Except the Lord keep the city, the watchmen cannot keep it ; except the Lord build the city, the masons cannot put it up. It is the Lord that doeth all things, but he must have all his ministers at work—his denunciators, his prophets that fear no face of clay, his singers that know the subtlety and wizardry of music, and his apostles who come with great gospel speeches to heal broken hearts and dry the tears of repentance. It is in the midst of this mystery that we are set. Blessed is that servant who shall be found waiting, working, watching, when his Lord cometh !

Chapter ii.

NIGHT AND DAY IN ZION.

THE whole chapter is one of the most picturesque description to be found in all the record even of ancient prophecy. It is full of judgment, and it is full of gospel. The whole morning is darkened with locusts, yet at eventide there is light. Merely as an exercise in the pictorial art, were it nothing more, this chapter ought to stand amongst the masterpieces of literature. No man who had any regard to his own literary reputation could have written this—could have written thus in such broad, startling, tragic contrast; he would have said, The rules of art require different treatment, so as to secure something like proportion; some respect must be paid even in fiction to the genius of probability. Here you have thunders, lightnings, tempests, all the winds of heaven let loose upon the shaking earth; and presently, apparently without sufficient cause, there is a great lull, the dark sky breaks out here and there into translucent blue, and presently the whole firmament glitters with light, gleams with tender beauty, and the earth seems to be lifted up to celestial altitudes, and, without the process of learning, to be able to sing with the angels. It will be worth while, from a merely literary point of view, to study this wondrous narrative—mayhap we may find it to be more than literature; but the Lord will allow us to enter his sanctuary by many doors, even by the great public door above whose massive portals are written words of tender welcome and boundless hospitality, or by a little postern gate which we may be called upon to stoop before if we would enter with safety. The great thing to be done is to enter the sanctuary: no matter whether by the one door or by the other; to be in God's temple, to be seated at God's table, is the one thing needful.

The trumpet is lifted up this time in warning. Sometimes it

is lifted up in festival. The trumpet will do one of two things; the performer must tell it what to do. So with every ministry, and every instrumentality of life and nature; it is the intelligent, responsive, directing man that must say what is to be done with the silver lute of spring, or the golden instrument of summer, or the cornucopia of autumn, or the great wind of winter that makes the earth cold and bleak. The trumpet will foretell a coming battle, or it will call to an infinite feast; the man behind it must use it according to the occasion. It is even so with the Bible. There is no trumpet like the Bible for warning, alarm, excitement, a great blare at midnight shaking the whole air with tones of alarm; nor is there any instrument like the Bible for sweetness, gentleness, tenderness, an instrument that talks music to the heart, and that assures human fear that the time of apprehension has passed away. Warning has always been given by the Almighty before his judgments have taken effect. Yet there has always been some measure of suddenness about divine judgments. The reason is that we cannot sufficiently prepare for them. We may know they are coming, we may tell even to a day when the judgment thunder will lift up its voice; yet when it does sound its appeal it startles and shocks and paralyses the world. Is the Lord going to sow the Cities of the Plain with the awful seed of fire and brimstone? Will he plough the land with lightning, and fill its furrows with this fatal seed? Will he hide from Abraham the thing which he doeth? Will he not call away the righteous from among the wicked, that they be burned not by the impartial and indiscriminating fire? Is the Lord about to make all heaven one water-cloud, and pour it down upon the earth in an avenging deluge? Is there not a prophet of the Lord in the midst of the people to tell that the rain is gathering, that a fountain is being fashioned that shall open its mouth in infinite torrents, and destroy the sinful world?

Yet, though the warning has always been given, it has always been despised. How few people heed the voice of warning! They call that voice sensational. Were the old preachers to return with their old hell they would have but scant welcome to-day. They were men of the iron mouth; they were no Chrysostoms, golden-throated and golden-lipped; they were men

who, knowing the terrors of the law, withheld them not from the knowledge of the people, but thundered right mightily even beside the altar of the Cross. Now all this is in many instances ruled out as theologically behind the time, as from a literary point of view vulgar and odious, and as from a spiritual point of view detestable, and not likely to work in man mightily in the direction of persuasion. We become familiar with warning. No man really believes in the day of judgment. Many a man will assert it, probably few within the Church would care to deny it; many are delighted to hear it proclaimed; but who really, inmosty, with his heart's heart, with his soul's soul, believes that he shall have to give an account for every deed and word done and spoken in the flesh? There are some burdens we could not carry and do life's daily business. The Lord is very merciful herein, that he does not require us to carry all this weight of warning, all this thunder of doom; it is enough, if properly used now and then, to know that God has in his possession a glittering sword, and that he will judge the earth in righteousness; then the burden is lifted from us, and we go about the day's business with a little time to attend to the little day's comparative trifles. We have time for music and for innocent mirth, and for the reciprocation of offices that perish in the using; forasmuch as man, flesh and blood, created out of the dust, a wind, a creature that finds his metaphor in the flying shuttle, could not carry this burden of judgment day by day, night by night; his brain would reel under the weight, and in insanity he would find his only release.

But the warnings given us by men are often partial, and are not unfrequently falsely directed. There is not a preacher in the world who could not make a great reputation by thundering against heterodoxy. The world loves such vacant thunder; the Church is willing to subscribe liberally to any man who will denounce the heterodoxy of other people. Men who are fattening themselves at the table of wickedness like the devil of heterodoxy to be tethered to the deepest hell; it does not disturb them, they are willing to pay tribute if by so doing they may pass another gate that opens into some wider liberty and finer licentiousness of action. We do not need such warning. There is nothing

easier than to sit beside a glowing fire, with our feet plunged into carpets of velvet pile, and to dictate by the hour maledictions against earnest men who somehow have lost the sight of one eye, or momentarily the sight of both, and are groping as only blind men can grope after things essential and eternal. We have had enough of such warning in all ages; it is empty, blatant, pointless, often unjust and cruel, because based upon misunderstandings and misapprehensions. What we do want is, not to thunder warningly against mistaken speculation, but thunders sevenfold in loudness to be delivered against the current iniquities of the day. Let a man speak against wickedness, and he will be killed! Let any prophet, even fiery and fearless as Joel the prophet of the oven of the Lord, stand up and speak against drunkenness, gluttony, sharp practice, malfeasance, and that man will be invited to no smoking tables; he will be a death's-head at any feast to which he may have found unexpected and unwelcome access. Yet that is the warning which the age requires; and no man can give it and live. Speak against a false conception of the constitution of the Godhead, and there are rich men who will subscribe to your funds hundreds and thousands of pounds; stand up and declare that never will you permit a false theory regarding the inspiration of the Scriptures, and there are fat debauchees that will clap their gluttonous hands, and look out of their evil eyes all manner of approval; but assail iniquity, measure the wand and see if in its yard there be six-and-thirty inches, lift up the scales to know whether they are equal, search the candle of life with the fire of the Lord, and you will soon be crucified; no man will subscribe to your funds; you will be legalists, you will be moralists, you will be persons who do not understand the evangelical religion. Better be without the patronage of such men; it makes all work easy now, it takes the rust out of every hinge for the passing moment, but by-and-by the gain will burn the hand that takes it, and the man who has taken it will discover that though he has sat at the table of the Lord, his name is Judas Iscariot.

Warning is needed, but let it be of the right kind; warning is a needful element in every ministry, but deliver it at the right door. To hear some men stand up and claim to be the guardians

of truth and orthodoxy and sound doctrine would distress the heart if it did not amuse the imagination. That men who are never troubled with an idea, brains that never saw heavens and creations and universes proceeding moment by moment fast as the seconds can fall from the fountain of eternity—that such men should have patronised the Lord is an intolerable and inexplicable irony. We do not then deprecate warning, blowing of the trumpet in Zion ; we simply ask that it be directed to the right end. Lycurgus was the noblest of Spartans ; he was a rigorous disciplinarian ; in some aspects he was the admired and all but idolised of his country ; but when he denounced the misuse of its wealth, when he levelled his guns against the corruption of his day, he was stoned in the city that was proud of him, and had to seek refuge from common ruffianism behind the altar of the temple ; his flesh was cut by the ruffians' cane, and whilst the blood ran down his noble face no word of reproach escaped him. Let any man reprove the iniquities of his day, thunder against the malpractices of corporations and all other institutions, and he will be struck in the face, he will be stoned on the streets, he will be hated in conversation, and the rich thieves that live to old age on their plunder will never subscribe to his funds. God be thanked ! there is a redeeming point in their awful reputation.

The imagery of Joel is of the most vivid, exciting, and alarming kind. He still bases his vaticinations upon the desolating action of the fourfold and four-named locusts. The locust was a fact, and not a metaphor ; yet though the locust was the direst fact in the history of the country, it was but a poor symbol of the corruption which had brought upon that country avenging hosts. If the chapter ended with the eleventh verse, it would be the volcano of the Bible ; but from the twelfth verse another tone comes in and rules the wild turbulence into domestic music :—

“Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning : And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God : for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.” [John never wrote tenderer words ; Paul never welcomed the people to the heart of Christ with larger and tenderer liberality of hopefulness and love.] “Who knoweth if he will return and

repent, and leave a blessing behind him; even a meat offering and a drink offering unto the Lord your God?" (vers. 12-14.)

That is the Gospel before the Christian era in the narrow historical sense. These words can never be displaced from the religious literature of the world until their spirit has been fulfilled. Men sing them, ministers preach from them, prodigals have their attention called to them, if haply their hearts may be subdued into penitential softness. "Rend your heart, and not your garments": let your repentance be moral, not ceremonial; imagine not that God cares for torn robes, except they be torn in consequence of an inner agitation, yea, the very agony of self-reproach and self-distrust. Many would be prepared to rend a garment—that would be a cheap sacrifice, withal it would be dramatic and pictorial; but the Lord will not have it so. The word of the Lord is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow. "Rend your heart"—that is the offender: "Rend your heart"—that is the liar. The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Repent in your souls; do not use words of repentance apart from the feeling of contrition. It is an evil thing that the lips should give hospitality to eloquent penitence when the heart does not feel the agony of contrition. By such familiarity we come to ruin; by such custom do we take the wonder out of God's miracles; yea, by such monotony do we destroy the infinite pathos of the Cross of Christ. "Rend your heart"; be sorry for your sin, not for its consequences. He cannot repent who says in the morning after his debauch he would he had been better last night, for his head to-day burns like a furnace. That is false reasoning and false morality, if the soul seek to avail itself of it as an appeal to God, instead of that profound vital conviction as to the sinfulness of sin, which alone can lead the heart to the Cross of the Son of God. There must be no church-going where the spirit is absent from the sanctuary; then church-going is a rending of the garment; there must be no lavish subscription to fill up the pit dug by the iniquity of men. "Rend your heart, and not your garments"; by broken-heartedness, and not by rags ceremonially manufactured, is the Lord of heaven to be appeased. This is the Old Testament. Verily it might be the New.

This gospel in the Old Testament, as well as in the New, is divinely offered, it is not humanly conceived: "Therefore also now, saith the Lord." All gospels come from heaven. All the flowers come from the sun. We grow nothing, as of the earth earthy, alone and exclusively. Every wee modest daisy in the sod was born really in the sun; it does but accept the sod as a cradle until its eyes are opened to look upon its true nativity. Every Christian word is a tone of supernal music; every great proposition that charms the imagination and creates new hope in the heart is a revelation from above. Nor must we read without emphasis properly directed and apportioned the words "thus saith the Lord." In English they amount to a mere statement; that is to say, a mere point in a passing incident. It is not so the word "saith" is used in the Hebrew tongue; as used originally, it signifies that it is the divine word, part of the divine essence, a symbol of the divine quality. "Thus saith"—that is a token of authority; virtue has gone out of God and gone to redeem the world. There are those who say they must have a "thus saith the Lord" for everything; let them be careful lest they regard that form as a mere sign. There is nothing merely signal about it; when the honest man utters a word he utters his heart; when the sincere soul prays every syllable is as a drop of blood. When we have a "thus saith the Lord," the emphasis is to be thrown into the word "saith," for it indicates that the Lord's heart has moved out towards the children of men, and that the Lord's pity is announcing a gospel to prodigals.

In the fifteenth verse the trumpet is blown again:—

"Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly: Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet." [And so the Lord is pleased to direct the people to pray and seek himself, and desire that their reproach may be taken away.] "Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God?" (vers. 15-17.)

Now we shall have a change of expression. From the moment that earnest prayers go up to heaven all the clouds will begin to disperse, and the rich blue sky will shine above the penitent returning earth. So we read, "Then will the Lord be jealous

for his land, and pity his people." Not "the" land, as if it were a mere geographical district; not "the" people, as if they were any people; but "his" land and "his" people,—touching the deepest, tenderest chord in the mystery of the divine nature.

"Yea, the Lord will answer and say unto his people, Behold, I will send you corn, and wine, and oil, and ye shall be satisfied therewith: and I will no more make you a reproach among the heathen" (ver. 19).

But what has become of the land that the locust has desolated? All the green things have been eaten, Eden has been turned into a wilderness, the fig tree has been barked, the forest yesterday green with beauty is to-day like an army stripped naked, whose shivering shoulders are turned to the bleak wind.

"Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the Lord will do great things. Be not afraid, ye beasts of the field: for the pastures of the wilderness do spring, for the tree beareth her fruit, the fig tree and the vine do yield their strength. Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God: for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month. And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the fats shall overflow with wine and oil. And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you. And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed" (vers. 21-26).

What a declaration is this! We thought the land was given over to night, and lo, the day-spring from on high hath visited it. We said, Summer is dead, and lo, in the very midst of the snows of winter the green things break through the earth, and birds begin to sing in the quiet air. "And my people shall never be ashamed." Twice are these words spoken, in verse 26 and in verse 27; and the words are spoken every day to every honest soul—"my people shall never be ashamed." That is a word which the Apostle Paul himself used: I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; I am not ashamed to call the Saviour Lord. "If any man be ashamed of me and of my name, of him will I be ashamed when I come in my glory."

"Ashamed of Jesus! Sooner far
May evening blush to own a star.
Ashamed of Jesus! Just as soon
May midnight blush to think of noon."

My people may be despised, misunderstood, reviled, put to all

sorts of tests ; but even this process shall end in their strengthening and in their purification. We cannot yet know how the awards will go personally and nationally, but we do know the great principles upon which divine issues will be determined ; the sheep shall be set on the right hand and the goats on the left ; good and faithful servants shall go up into many rulerships and into secure sanctuaries ; unprofitable servants shall go into outer darkness. Lift up your heads, rejoice in the Lord ; for his hand has been heavy upon you, and that pressure hath brought you to prayer ; out of your prayer shall come God's great answer, and ye who have seen sevenfold night should rejoice with unspeakable joy in the dawn of eternal day. This is the miracle of the Cross ; this is the triumph of God the Son. All this is the Gospel—historically before Bethlehem, but not essentially. Essentially the Gospel is in Genesis—essentially the Gospel is in first verse, first chapter of Genesis ; essentially the Bible owes its existence to the Gospel. If there had been no Cross before the foundation of the world, and no Cross in the after eternity of heaven, there could have been no Bible. Christ is Alpha and Omega ; First, Last, Midst ; Ancient of Days ; Child of yesterday.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, thine eye is upon all men. There is nothing hidden from thy vision. The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth. All things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do. Our downsitting and our uprising, our going out and our coming in, are not these all known in heaven? The very hairs of our head are all numbered. What we have; what we have not; what use we make of our opportunity; how we carry ourselves in life; what is our innermost motive and thought and purpose—are not all these known to him who is our Father and our Judge? If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us; if we confess our sins, thou art faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Hear us when, with bent heads and humble hearts and contrite spirits, each for himself says, God be merciful unto me a sinner. May thy Holy Spirit dwell in each of us; may we know the mystery of the name and of the work of Christ; may we enter into the sorrow of his passion, that we may afterward enter into the triumph of his resurrection; may we really be in Christ, and show that Christ is really in us; may we stand at his point of view, may we drink in his spirit, may we look upon the times as he looked upon his own day; may nothing escape us that is for the good and the welfare and the progress of ourselves and of society. Fill us with the spirit of Christ's own charity; make us pure, true, gentle, chivalrous; may we be known for our good-doing, for our heroism in darkness, for our nobleness in the midst of degeneracy; may we be faithful servants, honest stewards, doing our day's work not as hirelings, but as men who love the labour. Amen.

Chapter ii. 28–32.

“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit. And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said, and in the remnant whom the Lord shall call.”

PROMISED BLESSINGS.

THIS is a stage in the development of human history. The Lord never recedes; he continually and necessarily advances. His creation is succeeded by redemption; redemption is followed by sanctification; sanctification is completed by heaven and all that heaven means. There the imagination can fly no further; it must rest, and with closed eyes recall the wonders that have passed. A marvellous connection of words is this—"my spirit" and "all flesh." The time will come when there will be no flesh; the body is but for a moment, it is a temporary hut on the road; it may be made for the time being the very house of God and temple of the Spirit, but the condemnation of death is upon it. Nor need the body be all flesh; it may symbolise a spiritual body, a mystical temple, and it may be so disciplined and overruled and chastened as to be the soul's companion and helpmeet. This is the conquest of Gethsemane, this is the victory of the Cross; it is a struggle that tries every energy, and destroys what it tries, unless every energy be inspired, nourished, and daily sustained by the Holy Ghost. A wonderful word, too, is this "all flesh"; whatever is expansive, inclusive, firmamental in its reach and majesty of sympathy and security is divine, and is characteristic of the divine rule. We are all the work of God's hands, and the work of his own hands he will never forsake. The Lord made us, and not we ourselves; so whether Jews or Gentiles, whether near at hand or far away, we are all under God's eye, we are all shaped by God's hand, we are all illumined by God's Holy Spirit. The time has been promised when the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together. Thus the Lord breaks down supposed partiality, and invidious preferences, and small and worthless elections, and goes forth in the majesty of his love to claim the universe. There is no waste land in God's creation; if any beasts have claimed it, or any fiends have sought to possess it, they will be destroyed, yea, they shall be driven away with double destruction, and all God's universe shall be beautiful as a flower, bright as a star. This is all to come. Yet, meanwhile, God has been doing everything that is indicative of the advance and consummation of this beneficent purpose.

This is not a separating spirit ; old men and young men, and sons and daughters are all to be involved in this great baptism of divinest love. The official spirit separates itself from common life. The official man is daily tempted to commit the sin of contempt against the commonalty. It is difficult for the pulpit to be also the pew ; yet the pew is as inspired as the pulpit. We speak of an inspired ministry ; we should also speak of an inspired Church. The ministry is for the Church, not the Church for the ministry ; we should look to the household of faith as the great elective and ordaining power. He who is not ordained by the priesthood of believers is not ordained at all, though a thousand prelates may have put their jewelled fingers on his barren head. Whatever tends to separate the teacher from the taught in any sense that breeds contempt is evil. The teacher is only a fellow student, an elder brother. Apollos, eloquent and mighty in the Scriptures, must go to Priscilla and Aquila, and sit with them, and in their humble home talk over mysteries with which he, with all his eloquence and might, is but a novice. The inspiration of the Church is a grander conception than the inspiration of any class belonging to the Church. We prove our inspiration by the uses to which we put our gift—by our charity, our nobleness, our sweetness of soul, our moral wholesomeness. It is useless to lay down parchments and papers bearing quaint old seals to prove our inspiration ; we are not certificated, we are inspired, if we are truly in the kingdom of God. No man ever preaches to a congregation in which there are not men who know much more than he does. They may not know it along some particular line of which he is master, but they know by the heart, by experience, by a thousand instances that have passed before their critical eyes ; they know the right from the wrong, the true from the false ; they cannot be imposed upon by spiritual dross, they are well acquainted with the gold and the fine gold of the sanctuary.

This inspiration, observe, goes from old to young : “ Old men shall dream dreams.” Then they are not old men. There are no old dreamers—the dream keeps the soul young ; it has always a new colouring upon it, always a new tone ringing through it, always does it open a new outlook in the cloudy horizon.

"Their young men shall see visions." That well becomes them. Passion does not dream; it sees heavens, figures, it has a gift and faculty for the turning of clouds into letters, and storms into speeches, and all nature into a library and a sanctuary of learning. Woe to the Church when the young men shall see no visions, when they are ox-eyed, when they look down into the pasture that they may take another mouthful of succulent grass! Honour to the nation, and great advance, when the young men see some brighter things, when they call out, *Excelsior!* higher,—*Meliora!* better things yonder. Where the young men talk so you cannot keep a community permanently back. Dreams and visions are the real power of life. They are not so accounted, but because they are not so accounted they are not therefore divested of their spiritual significance and their spiritual power. It is the dream that rules; it is the vision—white, ghostly, spectral outline, partly a thought, partly a thing, a shape without a shape—that leads the sentiment and the ambition of the world. It is one of two things: it is inspiration coming down from above, or indigestion and evil suggestion coming up from within, from corrupt selfish desire, narrow and crude ambition. The Bible promises great things, brighter things, always grander things than we have yet seen. When we have heard the prophecy, we have said, This is the consummation of prophecy, there can be nothing beyond this; write *Finis* at this point, for this is the end. And lo, while our ignorance is thus drawing lines, behold, a new heaven opens, and a morning unprecedented in brightness dawns upon the world.

Everything is going on but the Church. The Church never does go on when it can stand still. The Church is cursed with the spirit of finality. By "the Church" understand not one section or denomination, but all sections, all communions, constituting in their entirety the so-called Ecclesia, the body religious, and the body spiritual, convened for the representation of God, and the affirmation of the laws of his kingdom. The Church is a coward; the Church dare not speak above its breath; the Church will be glad if you will allow it to sleep under the stars anywhere, anyhow. The power that should be inspired, and that should lead all politics, all learning, all science, all civilisa-

tion, will be very thankful if you will shake your tablecloth, and let it catch what crumbs it can. We must never forget that God has been present in all ages; that inspiration is a growing quantity, but it has always been the gift of God to the race he made. Inspiration is not confined to this class or to that class; wherever there is a man, you find in that man something that indicates that he is immeasurably superior to the finest, strongest, noblest beast that treads the jungle; ay, infinitely more than the brightest winged bird, that seems to have some native right to go up to the sun, and ask him to speak in syllables of light. God has never left himself without witness. It may be questioned whether in many boasted departments of progress we are so far forward as were many ancient men. There was one Cimon, an Athenian, who lived in anything but a healthful national or civic atmosphere; but Cimon, the Athenian, gave orders to throw down all his fences and hedges, that the poor and the stranger might come into his garden and eat what fruit they wanted. Christians, particularly Quaker Christians, build very high walls, and make very fine speeches about other people's fruit. Seneca never heard of Christ, never was in the Church, as we understand that term, but he wrote with his pagan hand, "Wherever we are, God is; and wherever we are, the divine and the human are equally distant." Was that not an inspired thought? Said he, in geometric phrase, "Every point in the circumference is equally distant from the centre." Thus the Lord hath not left himself without witness in the world. Pericles never made a public speech without first making a private prayer to the gods; and his were poor gods, miserable dumb gods, that had no answer either to profanation or to reverence; yet such prayer did Pericles good. Every prayer does a man good. If a man should even in his ignorance pray to stock or stone, he will rise from his altar a stronger clearer-minded man, better able to speak in public, to fight battles, and to conduct the business of the nation. Prayer, though it be poured downward, if with an honest heart lifts the mind to a higher level. He who never prays never realises his fullest, broadest, noblest self. He who truly prays keeps the age under his feet; he goes out to fight and to win, and returns asking help, that he may bear his trophies safely home.

So the Lord hath had great compassion upon the race. We boast of our immediate civilisation. Until very recently, comparatively speaking, men could be taken up bodily, and put in gaol for debt in a Christian land, under a Christian sun, and under a Christian sovereign, and under all manner of Christian paraphernalia and pretension. The old Greek Solon abolished imprisonment for debt, and he never heard even of Congregationalism; so ignorant was he, and benighted, that he never heard of any of our modern denominations. Yet he—was it by a spirit infernal or by a spirit divine?—abolished bodily imprisonment for men who were unable to pay their debts. We have our institutions for the prevention of cruelty to animals; we think they are very modern, we praise ourselves for having invented a new authority. Pythagoras suggested the doctrine of the transmigration of souls in order that he might, in his day, and in his pagan darkness, prevent cruelty to animals; for, the pagan would say, we cannot tell what spirit is in this animal; in smiting this beast of burden we may be smiting some one whom we ought to honour and love. Sometimes the invention of a superstition may be turned into practical philanthropy. What do we more than others? How far have we carried this larger and diviner inspiration? Let us think of these things, and be at once humbled and instructed.

So the Lord will pour out his spirit upon the old man and the young man, and the sons and the daughters. Will he end there? Is this an invidious inspiration? Is this for the household circle only that eats at the same table, and gratifies its appetite under the same barren benediction? Nay, verily—"And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my Spirit." We do not get the right meaning by thinking of servants in the modern sense of the term. The real word here is *slaves*. The Lord says, I will inspire slaves; I will not forget men whose clanking chains are heard in the field and in the prison-house. Slaves are men. This is the Bible, this is the book that is sometimes ruthlessly spoken against; this is the revelation of God. And that revelation was made to others; it was made to the same Seneca whose words we have just quoted. Writing to Lucilius his friend, he said, "I am glad that you are

living on terms of familiarity with your slaves—slaves? nay, men. Slaves? companions rather. Slaves? no, humble friends. Slaves? fellow slaves.” These were the words of the old moralist; how much higher have we risen? We might have risen infinitely higher if we had accepted our day of visitation, and availed ourselves of the profounder and grander inspiration; but we are willing to pick up the crumbs, we are willing to sit anywhere. The Church knows nothing of politics; the Church ought not to meddle with business; the Church must be shut up in solitary confinement to sing its little hymns and prattle its little beliefs, and go out and forget them, to mingle with strenuous, tumultuous, perilous life. Whereas if this word of inspiration be true, and if this promise be ours, and if we are living under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, the Church should be the uppermost power in society; it should lead all fashion, all sentiment, all art; I repeat, all civilisation. The Church should be so large as to make heresy impossible or absurd. The Church should not be geometrical, drawing its little circle, or its sharp-angled parallelogram, and saying, Within these lines you must live and move and have your being, and you can hang up on the walls of these lines whatever little idolatrous beliefs you care to have there, in chromo or in fresco, or in water-colours or oils; but you must not go beyond these lines. We who might have our picture on the heavens, we to whom the firmament is granted as a gallery,—we, the living Church, dare not mention anything political; dare not refer to business; dare not rectify the yard-measure that is short, or the scales that are unequal; we can only nurse the doll orthodoxy, and take it out on Sundays in some ecclesiastical perambulator—the Church that is promised inspiration, that the Holy Ghost longs to come into, to fill, to warm with fire, and to bless with light!

We read in one verse here of “the name of the Lord.” We cannot understand what that means by looking at it in this plain English. “The name of the Lord” was a very significant word in the olden times. Elijah said, “Call on your gods, and I will call on the name of the Lord.” The real meaning is, The Lord is; I will call on the I AM, the Eternal Life, that throbs in all the universe, that breathes in the wind, that blooms in the flower,

that burns in the star, that exalts itself in the immeasurable firmament, that thunders with the voice of many waters, around whom the lightnings gather themselves and say, Here we are. I will call upon the Essence. Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord in that sense, the I AM, the Triune, the Three-One, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost, shall be delivered, shall be saved. We can never reconcile these things theologically, and get all men to accept them in terms and forms of expression; but the soul is larger than any body into which you can put it; the spirit cannot be confined within any cage of man's creation. There are times when we need God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost. We may not be conscious of that need every day; for some time, a long time it may be, we may lack the religious consciousness altogether, and nature is enough for us, and our bodily desires and temporal ambitions satisfy all we need; at other times we rise in the fulness of our immortality, and claim all heaven as a resting-place and as a sphere of service. At those larger times we need the Cross, the blood, the propitiation, the atonement, the mystery of the priesthood of Christ. Let us understand that only because Christ came has the Holy Ghost come; the Holy Spirit is the gift of Christ; he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear and see that shall he relate to the Church; he will show you things to come. If the Church received this gift of Christ, it would be prescient; it would read the future like an open volume, and its heart would be at rest.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, teach us that thou art watching us in all our ways; may we accept this fact joyfully, knowing that if our ways please the Lord thou wilt make our enemies to be at peace with us. They that obey thee shall enjoy thy peace. May we through obedience become good scholars in thy school. Thou hast told us that if we do thy will we shall know thy doctrine; help us to obey, that we may learn, and thus to do and suffer that we may know all highest truth, all divinest teaching. We have begun at the wrong point; we have thought first to know, whereas we should have sought to obey, to do what little we can, to follow what light is already shining, and they that follow on to know the Lord shall ultimately enjoy his presence and his heaven. Thou didst send thy Son to die for us, and rise again, and now we hail him as our Intercessor, our Daysman between God and us, who knows us, who bare our sin, who carried our sorrow, and who understands our whole position. We put ourselves in the hands of Christ; for us they were nailed to the shameful tree. We will know thee through thy Son, and through thy Son we will offer our poor adoration to thee. We know that thou art a Rewarder of them that diligently seek thee; we feel thy presence in all things; we are assured that the earth belongeth unto the Lord, and that the history of man is a revelation of the purposes of heaven. Enable us to believe this, that we may have rest and security and great joy, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. Be the refuge of our soul; be thou in Christ Jesus the Lord, the sanctuary of our spirit, into which we may run in the day of calamity, and in which we may hold sweet communion with thee when all outside is full of trouble. Thou knowest the way that we take, and when thou hast tried us thou wilt bring us forth as gold. Teach us that we are at school; show us that thy purpose through and through is one of love and care. Thou art nurturing us, and bringing us onward from stage to stage in an upward progress, thy meaning being that we shall find our way into the place prepared for us by the Son of God. We are frail, and weak, and weary; our hearts often ache, and our eyes are often blinded with tears, and our whole way seems wrapped in a dark cloud: in these experiences may we be able to say, Clouds and darkness are round about him, but righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne; though he slay me, yet will I trust in him; if for a small moment he has forsaken me, with everlasting mercies he will gather me. Thus in great distresses may we realise thy great promises; in our hunger remind us that in our Father's house there is bread enough and to spare. Help us to read thy Word amongst men; enable us to see that the Cross is the central point of all

history; the explanation of eternity on its human side; and to the Cross may we fly as men who are dying of thirst hasten to brooks, and streams, and fountains, and there may we find all that our soul needs, because we find cleansing from sin, pardon of iniquity, release from the remorseful past, and an assurance that all our discipline rightly accepted and sanctified shall end in the perfectness of our character. The Lord hear us at all times; the Lord sometimes answer us. Separate the chaff from the wheat, the folly from the wisdom; and thou wilt only answer those prayers that cry to thee for more light, more holiness, more likeness to thy Son. Amen.

Chapter iii.

THE VALLEY OF DECISION.

IN the second verse of this chapter the Lord says, "I will plead with them." This would seem to put the Lord into a position of humiliation. He will ask a favour of the heathen; he will say to them, Why do ye persecute my people? will ye not relax your hold? It would be an act of magnanimity on your part, and they would receive the concession with thankful spirits. To "plead" may be regarded as equivalent to entreaty, desiring, persuading, conciliating. It has no such meaning here. "I will plead" means rather, I will judge,—I will bring every action to the light; I will pronounce upon every deed, I will avenge the wrong. The Lord is judge; he reigneth upon a throne of righteousness, and nothing that is impure, vicious, unworthy, unlovely can escape criticism and penalty. Read the chapter in its opening paragraphs, and you will discover that God is intimately acquainted with everything that is done to his Church. All the ways of the heathen are known to the Most High; all theft, all felony upon human rights, all insults offered to human dignity, the Lord knoweth right well, and he will speak all of them aloud when no human tongue dare utter the outrage in words. It is something to know that nothing has occurred to our life with which God is unacquainted; he knows who has done us wrong, he is well acquainted with the plots infernal, inhuman, cruel, malignant, which have been concocted with a view to our overthrow and ruin. It is something for the heart to know that every word that has been spoken against us when we have been doing God's will is well known to him who is our Father. For God to know is enough; such intelligence is not lodged with him in vain; it does not remain mere information, it brings with it moral issues,

judgments, retaliations, and the display of the whole artillery of providence.

Here are words we may not read aloud; the eye itself will scarcely rest upon them any more than it would rest upon metal heated to a scorching heat. But the Lord can write all words in his book; the sunbeam is a pen that cannot be polluted. The Lord can tell all the wickedness of human life, and so speak it that there shall be no stain left upon his lips. Who can touch pitch and not be defiled? Not one; yet the Lord can work among this pitch, and there shall be no taint upon his fingers. The one thing to be remembered is this: Whatever has happened to us, how bad soever, the Lord knows it. When the Lord knows the Lord judges. Men can receive information, and let it lie in the mind inactive; the Lord does not look upon the children of men and form indifferent opinions about their action; when the Lord sees an undeserved stroke he writes it down in his book, and he will retain it. This is not resentment; resentment is small, spiteful, narrow-minded, impetuous; resentment wishes to be satisfied at once, resentment strikes in hot temper. Law is not resentment; before the crime was committed the law fixed the penalty. Even law would cease to be law if it could be impassioned; it must be cold, stern; it must have no feeling; before circumstances are brought to it which can excite feeling, it must decide the penalty due to transgression. When the Lord judges the Lord is not in ill-temper, he is not petulantly excited; he never gives a stroke too much. When he appointed "forty stripes, save one," in that "save one" you have the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, the spirit of correction in measure, the spirit of calculated penalty, the spirit that will not strike for striking's sake; that will only chastise until the offending Adam has been whipped out of our nature. So when we read words that appear to be charged with the spirit of retaliation we are really admitted to a vision of what is truly meant by divine rights, complete judgment.

"And I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the children of Judah, and they shall sell them to the Sabeans, to a people far off: for the Lord hath spoken it" (ver. 8).

If man had written these words they would have been indicative

of excited temper; we should have said, Calm your passion; overrule yourself; do not return evil for evil. But written in this book, and charged upon the lips of God, they simply show the harvest of an evil seedtime. Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap. And you can only get at the bad sower by showing him what a bad harvest he has brought about. At some natures you can only get by touching the harvest field, the flesh, the purse of money, the barns that were enlarged but a year ago. The Lord knows how to direct his providence and to bring his judgment to fruition; let him alone; he dwells in Zion,—that is, in peace, in calm; the whole heritage of life is laid wide open before his vision; not a line escapes him, not a bird falleth to the ground without our Father. The Lord comes specifically into human history at certain points. It would seem as if he were looking upon the affairs of men, and forming his own judgment as to when he would appear, visibly, penally, beneficently, as the case may be.

In the ninth verse the Lord will come down. "Prepare war" is his cry; literally, Sanctify war, separate it from all other war. This is not a war of bloodshed, of strength against weakness; there is no element of tyranny or oppression in this conflict; it is a holy war. The Lord will have the mighty men awake out of their stupefaction, and he will have the weak man to stand up as if he were strong, and on the other side shall be only the Lord himself. He will show his enemies how to make weapons:—"Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruninghooks into spears": turn the metal of agriculture into the metal of war; turn the things that were intended for peace into instruments of assault and vengeance: get yourselves ready. There is a mocking tone in all the challenge. Then the Lord will plead with them, and his words shall be as sharp instruments, the opening of his lips shall be as the discharge of devastating artillery; a look will mean destruction, one sound of his voice shall be terrible as an infinite tempest. How singularly words are found in unexpected places! We have been so accustomed to say, "Beat your swords into plowshares," that when we first read the words, "Beat your plowshares into swords," we look again to see if it can possibly be so. Look, scan the verses well, for thus they read, "Beat your plow-

shares into swords, and your pruninghooks into spears." Micah had a different vision; he saw the Lord judging among many people, and rebuking strong nations afar off—"and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." All processes of this kind have a history; when you see the sword beaten into a plowshare you think, This is an act complete in itself; you do not know that that sword is itself a perverted and ill-treated plowshare. We do not know what we handle. There is history in everything; every weapon can tell its own story of transformation, old history, new purposes; behold, God has touched all things, and they are sacred because of that touch. There is nothing without meaning; every shadow is a dark writing of the finger of God; the broad, bright summer day is another way of declaring the Gospel, and proclaiming how bright and glorious is the kingdom of heaven. Count nothing common, vulgar, unclean. The earth has a history, and the sky has its own story to tell of what it has beheld among the children of men. A great picture is here presented:—

"Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision" (ver. 14).

We are tempted to make our own comments upon this word. Honoured men have preached from these statements rousing and profitable discourses; but we are bound, in the first instance, to know what the text really means: Multitudes in the valley of judgment; multitudes come together that they may be examined, criticised in the light of heaven, judged by the standard eternal and unchangeable. Why not accept that as the basis of an appeal to human intelligence and human conscience? There is to be a time of judgment, when the right and the left shall be specifically distinguished; when the bad and the good shall be known one from the other and separated for ever. Who undertakes this marvellous classification? Blessed be God, not man; thanks be unto heaven, we are to be judged by the Creator and not by the creature. What man could judge his brother? What does man know about his dearest friend? He knows nothing. We live upon appearances: life watched like a thief has yet a thousand cunning tricks of its own; the soul that would apparently walk

in whiteness has visors thin as films which it draws over itself, and through which the most penetrating human eye cannot pierce. We might go further in this psychology and say, No man knows himself. To himself every man is a surprise; he stands back from many an action, and says, I did not think I could have acted so; I must have been possessed. When does the evildoer fail to plead suddenness of attack? He says he was surprised into this policy, or into this course of procedure. He says, excusing himself, If I had taken time to consider the whole circumstances, I should not have done so. He pleads that he was precipitated, that he was attacked when he was in a sort of panic, and therefore he begs that the sentence of the court of justice may be, if not annulled, yet graciously mitigated.

Blessed be God, he is the Judge, and we bless his name in the capacity of judge, because he knows all. Man when judging can know but a little part. God knows the mystery of heredity; the Lord knows what ancestor it is in us that is doing this deed or that. The Lord knows that he has a hard lot who was born last. Adam had nothing mysterious, perplexing, distracting; he was fresh from the Maker's hand. Be that Adam whom he may, the Adam of the Bible or the Adam of geology, no matter what Adam, the man that began the series of men had an easy lot compared to the lot the child will have who was born yesterday. All past tributaries flow into the river of the last birth. A man is not himself in any little, narrow, minute, measurable sense. Elizabeth said she felt the blood of a hundred kings in her veins, burning in anger, or rising in pride; we who are not in the line of kings nominally may be in a mysterious line nevertheless. The drunken ancestor; the diseased mind; the relative that died two hundred years ago a raving maniac; the saintly mother and the saintly grandmother, Eunice and Lois; the man that prayed all day, and thought the day too short because he had more to say to God; all these are in a man. What wonder if in the morning he blaspheme, and at night he pray, if this moment he rave like one in whose disordered brain "reason has lost her way," and the next moment be giving himself out in acts of love, in alms of tender pity and all-including charity? Who can judge him? Only the Lord. The Lord knows every drop of blood that is in

the fountain of the heart; the Lord, the mighty Judge, presides over that fountain, and says concerning each drop, This tells of five centuries ago: this drop tells of the praying soul that importuned my throne, and took many blessings by gracious violence; this drop has in it bodily disease, poison generated a century since. He knows our frame, he remembereth that we are but dust; let him judge; let no man ascend the judgment seat. Many shall be first who were last, and many shall be last who were first; a great reversion of positions shall take place, because the Lord knoweth all things. He knows whether Iscariot wanted to murder Christ. If there be one good speck in Iscariot the Lord will lay his finger upon it; and he who said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," will save Iscariot if he can be saved.

The Lord must portray us to ourselves; what surprise will then startle us when the Lord tells us what we have been doing, and we never knew it. Yet there are base men who take salary on quarter days as the result of judging the souls of other men. There are those—hucksters, stall-keepers—who feed their virtue on the price they get for denouncing the vices of other men. The Lord will have them in the valley of judgment some day, and he will burn them with unquenchable fire; and many an outcast, breadless, homeless, friendless, will be set among the white-robed angels, because of elements of character not known to the magistrate who sentenced to prison and to the self-elected judge who condemned without mercy. There are more good men in the world than we have reckoned in our statistics; when the sifting time comes it will be the Church that will supply the dust-bin. Read the lives of men who never made any nominal profession of religion, and see how often you find consideration, pity, benevolence, great services, partaking of the nature of sacrifice, rendered by them without ostentation, or without claim upon those who give reputations to men.

In the light of this fact every man must judge himself. Every man knows whether he is good or bad. Every man must determine himself by majorities. We have amplified this thought in former Bible readings. Every man carries his own actions by

a majority vote. Can a single man know the mystery of minority and majority? Certainly. Every man who reasons upon life says he will carry out such a policy for so many reasons; on the other hand, he says there are so many more reasons against that policy; if there be six reasons for it, and nine reasons against it, the action is taken upon the majority. You know whether you are a bad man or a good one; do not whine and cant and analyse yourself so as to draw attention to the leanness of your virtue, or the subtlety of your piety: "Brethren, if our heart condemn us——" that is the standard. Ask no pastor whether you are good or not; the answer is in yourself. But you are called drunkard by men? That is nothing; you may not be a drunkard, though you have reeled in the streets by reason of wine; the question is, Are you drunk in your soul? You may be thought to be violent, but men do not know what violence is. Do you feel gentle in heart, and is it your daily struggle to be gentle in manner? Then the Lord will judge you, and set you among his gentle ones. Are you sober? You may be sober according to the flesh, and drunk in the soul every night; no drunkard shall enter the kingdom of heaven. A man is what he is in his soul. There are those who have been excommunicated from altars which the Lord never sanctified who have been better than the priests who condemned them to outer darkness. Let us inspire ourselves by this reflection—the Lord will judge. If we can say to him, after cursing, swearing, denial, blasphemy, cowardice, "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee," all the black night work shall be forgotten, and on the shore in the morning we shall begin our new heaven. Be severe with yourselves; thrust the knife still further in; hold the light nearer, nearer. The Cross is the bar of judgment.

If by accommodation we turn the word "decision" into its ordinary meaning, we may even by accommodation avail ourselves of some useful thoughts. Think of the idea of numerous multitudes, multitudes upon multitudes, in the valley of decision, in the sense of each saying, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." That is decision. How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, serve him; if Baal, serve him, and name him aloud, and do not be ashamed of your silent

impotent deity. Give him all the praise you can ; he could only exist nominally upon eulogium, he could not survive the curses of his idolaters ; he lives on praise ; do not be ashamed of him—except when you call upon him to do anything for you ; avoid the shame by never asking a favour at his hands. There is no need to halt. The Lord is waiting, his mercy is ready : “ Seek ye the Lord while he may be found : call ye upon him while he is near.” All the sound argument is on the side of spiritual decision. There is not an argument against Christianity that is worthy of one moment’s consideration. It is important to us all to know truth, and fact, and reality. We have taken a course of infidelity ; we have perused the writings of the enemy, and we have risen from the perusal, saying, The Lord he is God : the Lord he is God.

It is supposed that Christian teachers have some interest in bolstering up superstition. They have not ; they are honest men ; it is because the Bible is strong at every point, and able to carry all the weight of life, that they return to it, saying, The word of the Lord abideth for ever. It is of importance to the Christian preacher that he should not be making a fool of himself. He cannot afford to trifle with the future any more than other men can ; he must be taken, therefore, on the ground of his intelligence and his conscience and his general character, and if he live on the food he offers to others, and if the result of that living is stature, massiveness of character, nobility of soul, beauty of disposition, charity of temper, let justice be rendered to the nutriment upon which he subsists. There is no time to halt. Time is earnest, passing by. Behold our days are like a post, yea, our moments outfly the weaver’s shuttle ; it is scarcely morning before it is night ; men hardly have time to hail one another with kindly salutes on the dawn of the year before their feet are walking over the shed leaves of autumn, and the men themselves are talking of the shortening days and the closing year. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might, for the grave is dug ; in the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand ; rise early and be amongst the first who go into the Lord’s field that they may till and cultivate the appointed ground. There is no time to lie, to forswear

thyself, to neglect thyself, to starve thy soul, to gratify thy passions which are secretly eating up thy heritage of immortality—there is no time. Say we have a century at our disposal, we could allot the decades, and say the first for the devil, the second for God, the third for ourselves, the fourth for Christ, and so on; and thus befool ourselves, and try to live the ambiguous or ambidextrous life. Thou knowest not what a day may bring forth. He that judgeth thee is at the door; set thy house in order, for this year thou shalt die; thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee. God has always this hold upon us—the hold of the uncertainty of life. Behold the giant rises and says, It shall be with me to-day as yesterday,—and at night they are measuring his cold clay for a coffin. The proud man's eyes kindle as he looks upon his fields, his continually increasing estates; and behold, whilst he is looking he reels, he is blanched by some invisible blight, and the man who came out like a king is carried back home a helpless load of flesh. Thou canst not tell what a day may bring forth; thy breath is in thy nostrils: O haste thee, for the time is short. Again hear the sweet word, its silver tones coming over hill and sea, coming from eternity: Seek ye the Lord while he may be found: call ye upon him while—while—while: a measured word—while he is near.

A M O S.

A'MOS (עֲמוֹס, *a burden*; Ἀμὸς; *Amos*), a native of Tekoah in Judah, about six miles S. of Bethlehem, originally a shepherd and dresser of sycamore-trees, was called by God's Spirit to be a prophet, although not trained in any of the regular prophetic schools (i. 1; vii. 14, 15). He travelled from Judah into the northern kingdom of Israel or Ephraim, and there exercised his ministry, apparently not for any long time. His date cannot be later than the 15th year of Uzziah's reign (B.C. 808, according to Clinton, *F. H.*, i. p. 325); for he tells us that he prophesied "in the reigns of Uzziah king of Judah, and Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel, two years before the earthquake." This earthquake (also mentioned Zech. xiv. 5) cannot have occurred after the 17th year of Uzziah, since Jeroboam II. died in the 15th of that king's reign, which therefore is the latest year fulfilling the three chronological indications furnished by the prophet himself. But his ministry probably took place at an earlier period of Jeroboam's reign, perhaps about the middle of it, for, on the one hand, Amos speaks of the conquests of this warlike king as completed (vi. 13; cf. 2 Kings xiv. 25); on the other the Assyrians, who towards the end of his reign were approaching Palestine (Hosea x. 6; xi. 5), do not seem as yet to have caused any alarm in the country. . . . The book of the prophecies of Amos seems divided into four principal portions closely connected together. (1) From i. 1 to ii. 3 he denounces the sins of the nations bordering on Israel and Judah as a preparation for (2), in which, from ii. 4 to vi. 14, he describes the state of those two kingdoms, especially the former. This is followed by (3) vii. 1—ix. 10, in which, after reflecting on the previous prophecy, he relates his visit to Bethel, and sketches the impending punishment of Israel which he predicted to Amaziah. After this in (4) he rises to a loftier and more evangelical strain, looking forward to the time when the hope of the Messiah's kingdom will be fulfilled, and his people forgiven and established in the enjoyment of God's blessings to all eternity. The chief peculiarity of the style consists in the number of allusions to natural objects and agricultural occupations, as might be expected from the early life of the author. See i. 3; ii. 13; iii. 4, 5; iv. 2, 7, 9; v. 8, 19; vi. 12; vii. 1; ix. 3, 9, 13, 14. The book presupposes a popular acquaintance with the Pentateuch (see Hengstenberg, *Beiträge zur Einleitung ins Alte Testament*, i. p. 83-125), and implies that the ceremonies of religion, except where corrupted by Jeroboam I., were in accordance with the law of Moses. The references to it in the New Testament are two: v. 25,

26, 27 is quoted by St. Stephen in Acts vii. 42, and ix. 11 by St. James in Acts xv. 16. As the book is evidently not a series of detached prophecies, but logically and artistically connected in its several parts, it was probably written by Amos as we now have it after his return to Tekoah from his mission to Bethel. (See Ewald, *Propheten des Alten Bundes*, i. p. 84 ff.)—SMITH'S *Dictionary of the Bible*.

Chapter i.

DIVINE JUDGMENTS.

"The words of Amos, who was among the herdmen of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel" (ver. 1).

PROPHETS persist in saying that they "saw" the word of God. It is more than a graphic expression; the explanation is not to be found in Hebrew poetry alone. Here is the expression of a deep conviction; here are men, be they whom they may, who shut out every other sight from their eyes, and had their vision fixed upon what they at least supposed to be the word of God. If it be sentimental we shall soon discover it; if it be lacking in substance it will not bear the pressure of the critical finger; but if it be moral, honest, noble, such a vision as commends itself to the conscience of the world, by so much will the prophet justly acquire credit and justly be invested with authority. We shall pay no attention to mere verbal colouring, or to mere verbal music; we shall listen to find out, if we can, whether there is any conscience in the strain, and by the conscience we shall stand or fall in regard to our estimate of any prophet.

Amos was not ashamed of his descent. Amos was not a farmer; Amos was, in the opinion of the best critics, a farm-labourer. We have great interest in farm-labourers as a whole, or in a certain indefinite sense in the abstract. Who cares to be upon very close intimacy with a field hand or a cowherd? Yet this is just what Amos was; and to a little outdoor work he added the process of cleaning and preparing the fruit either for preservation or for sale; and whilst he was doing his farm work, and attending to his fruit, a blast from heaven struck his deepest consciousness, and he stood up a prophet. The Lord will bring his prophets just as he pleases, and from what place he chooses.

We should like him sometimes to bring them from other places and in other clothes, and with other pedigrees. We are neatly-minded ; we pay attention to appearances ; we are the devotees of a perishing, because a superficial, respectability. We would have all the clergy brought from the higher ranges of social life, even though they be second sons, and even though they be not equal to the first in breadth and grasp of intellect. The Lord will not have it so, and he will be Lord. God cannot vacate. Somebody must come down from the chair of authority ; God will not, God cannot, for the reason that he is God. Amos was a field hand, and yet he was fearless ; he was all the more fearless because he was a field hand. A farmer could not have been so fearless. The plough was his if nothing else, and some little agricultural property belonged to him, and it would never do needlessly to send abroad a breath of tempest, a roar of judgment. It did not matter to the field hand where he slept ; he could sleep as well outside as inside : "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head"—he was rich in his poverty. Amos was an agricultural labourer ; yet he was religious. That is an impossible miracle. That a labourer should have any religion or ever pretend to pray is a startling circumstance. Yet thus it hath pleased God to work, that the mother knows more than the father, the woman's eye sees miles beyond the masculine vision ; while the man is getting his lenses ready, the woman has read all the small print on the horizon. Father, thou hast hidden many things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes : even so, for so it seemeth good in thy sight. God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise. When we know least we often know best. Amos was a farm-labourer, yet he was equal to the occasion. Education is never equal to anything that is supremely great. Information is handy, useful, and is sometimes particularly available in instances in which men try to make progress by contradiction ; but there come times in human history when inspiration must go to the front ; talent—neat, measurable, drilled, educated, and expensively adjusted talent—must go behind, and genius must go to the first place. When we are inspired we forget our rags. Inspiration makes the lowliest descent noble. A man may not have descended

from the Plantagenets, he may only have descended from the Shakespeares and Miltons, the Isaiahs and the Ezekiels. It is often conceived that there is only a fleshly pedigree, as if flesh and bone might come down respectable ; but what of that mystery that connects the lowliest with the most vital intellectual genealogies ? What of that mysterious power that takes a man from the plough, and makes him sing until the ages listen ?

Whom God calls let not man despise. God's elections are startling. When did the Lord choose as we thought he ought to have chosen ? The old prophet in search of a king or a successor of a royal line will look upon stature and say, Not that : nobility of figure, and royalty of mien, as who should say in his every attitude, I am king to the manner born, and the old prophet will say, Not that. And when all the best specimens of the family have passed under prophetic review, he will say, Is there not another ? There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding. The Lord elected in Amos a layman. Ought the laity to prophesy ? Ought the pew to have any voice in the church ? The Lord answers our inquiries in the affirmative ; the Lord has allowed women to preach ; the Lord has encouraged little children to make the church walls ring with their resilient and vibrant voices ; and when learned rabbis would have checked them, and even imperfect disciples would have had them silenced, he said, Let the children sing ; if they did not sing the stones would sing. This is the Lord's manner of election, and we will not have it. It is always officially unpopular. It is a terrible thing for any man to be official. He is no longer himself—his natural, free, frank, fresh, genial, original self ; he is weighed down with something ; he is afraid of spectators ; he reads the bible of precedent ; he studies the apocrypha of tradition ; and he is always thankful when the official day is over and the official salary is paid. Officialism will not allow the laity to speak above a whisper ; officialism will look upon even those who occupy positions of teaching, and unless they have come through a certain routine they will say, Irregular ! That is a dangerous word in the mouth of officialism. Officialism is nothing if not regular. Yet all the divine election has been lost upon us ; we are as stupid to-day as

the men were in the most ancient times. We cannot have it that God has stooped to put a ploughman in the prophet's office. We may get over it a century afterwards ; there may be those who would to-day clap their hands applaudingly at the mention of the name of Bunyan who would not admit a living Bunyan to fellowship, intimacy, hospitality. Something might be given to him at the back door. It is one thing to applaud the heroes, the prophets, the seers of old time, and another to recognise their successors to-day.

"Seven towns contend for Homer dead,
Through which the living Homer begged his bread,"

History is lost upon us. We learn nothing. How can we learn anything when we were born in the bottle of an island, and we are afraid lest anybody should draw the cork, and let us see out ?

Amos begins where all rude, energetic minds begin ; they begin in denunciation. Judgment seems to be a natural work for them to conduct. They may be educated out of this—educated into moderation, into connivance, into compromise, into concession, but speaking fresh from the Lord, speaking after immediately turning round from the divine face, they judge the world. "Know ye not that the saints shall judge the world ?" And Amos issues his judgment against Damascus, Gaza, Tyrus, Edom, Ammon, Moab, Judah, Israel,—all round the circle that judgment fire sparkles and blazes. It was like a farm-labourer, to have no resource but fire. All this is true to nature. It seems so much easier to denounce than to discriminate. Even young prophets began with thunder and lightning ; in every instance Amos, representing the Lord, says, "But I will send a fire into the house of Hazael, which shall devour the palaces of Ben-hadad. . . . But I will send a fire on the wall of Gaza, which shall devour the palaces thereof. . . . But I will send a fire on the wall of Tyrus, which shall devour the palaces thereof. . . . But I will send a fire upon Teman, which shall devour the palaces of Bozrah. . . . But I will kindle a fire in the wall of Rabbah, and it shall devour the palaces thereof." And the nobles were lying on divans of ivory, having corrupted themselves to the point of rottenness. There are times in human history

when the only disinfectant that can work the real miracle is fire. Fire never fails. When the prophet says, "For three, and for four transgressions" of Damascus, Gaza, Tyrus, Edom, Moab, Judah, Israel, he is not using an arithmetical term; the expression is idiomatic, it means the surplus sin—the sin that overflows. The vessel of iniquity is filled up, and then another great wickedness is put in, and the vessel overflows,—“for three, yea, for four”—for a multitude of sins, for sin carried to the point of aggravation and intolerableness. I will send a fire upon the divans, and the couches of ivory shall be burned, and the nobles shall be disinfected with death. We need voices of this kind; they help to keep the average of human history well up to the mark. We could not live on lullabys, we do not want nursery rhymes; they may come in now and again. There may come times when we sing, “Far, far away, like bells at evening pealing,”—that may be indeed a sweet nonsense or useful piety, as the case may be; but the ages have made it fire and brimstone, thunder and lightning, judgment, criticism sharp as the eyes of God. Those you find in the Bible. The Bible is not only the most mysterious and transcendental book in literature; it is the most moral book. There is most of honesty in it—right, fair, square, downright dealing with wrong, whatever the guise in which it hides its ugliness; the Bible will tear the visor from the actor's face, and show him in all his native and calculated odiousness.

What were the punishments for? Here again arises the moral standard. Will the Lord punish for the sake of punishing? Does he call for war simply that he may tear the prophets in twain, and wither the pride of Carmel, sweetest garden of the world, snowy with blossoms of purest white, green with emerald such as eyes had never seen or art invented? Is this arbitrary wrath? The answers are before us; we can judge the course of the divine policy and action. There is in every instance a cause. Take Damascus—“because they have threshed Gilead with threshing instruments of iron.” The Lord will not commend cruelty. If you oppress any man because he is weak the Lord's fire will burn you, even though that man be only an apprentice in your establishment, or a doorkeeper in your house of commerce, or a pauper supposedly under your care. Who is there in the

world that cannot condemn with living scorn a man who has no money? He seems to be born to be driven out of the way—ordered to move on. How goes the judgment? Read in the case of Tyrus—“because they delivered up the whole captivity to Edom, and remembered not the brotherly covenant.” Passion cares nothing for treaties. We meet in solemn congress, and write covenants and clauses and stipulations, and we adorn our signatures with infinite sealing-wax, and we say, This is better than war. It may be, or it may not be; that depends upon the use we make of the document. A man adds to his infamy when he denies his own signature, especially when that signature pledges him to responsibilities of the gravest and costliest kind. When passion overcomes any man he is no longer himself; he cannot consult moral obligations, or review himself in the light of spiritual judgments; the very devil infests every corner of his being, and the covenant is disannulled.

How goes the judgment? Is it arbitrary? Read in the case of Edom—“because he did pursue his brother with the sword, and did cast off all pity, and his anger did tear perpetually, and he kept his wrath for ever.” The Lord will not have pitilessness. When Edom pursued he did not simply run a race, and when his breath failed return. The word “pursued” here means persisted. When we pursue a man in this sense we give him no rest, we hunt him night and day; if he have retired to slumber we awake him; if the man has concealed himself in the sanctuary of midnight, we uncover him, arrest him, and rejoice in his nakedness, and turn his shame into mockery. The Lord will not allow man to treat man thus. The Lord hath respect unto his own image and likeness. There may be lawful contentions, legitimate controversies; there may be competing claims which require a very nice judgment to adjust and settle; but man is not to pursue man as if one side of the party or controversy were immaculate and pure as the untrodden snow, and the other were all villainy, deceit, and wrong. Not thus will the Lord have the controversies of men adjusted. How goes the war? Hear the case of Ammon—“they have ripped up the women with child, that they might enlarge their border.” God will not have ill-gotten gain. Enlargement of borders is nothing compared with

righteousness. Yet to what will covetousness not drive a man? It will take away his sleep; it will make him jealous; it will fill him with rapacity. He must have something more, and yet another, and beyond; much will have more, and more most, and most all; and thus the infinite aggravation goes on. What if the Lord should stand up in the presence of his prophet, and say there can be no judgment upon this, short of the judgment of fire? Take the case of Moab—the Lord “will send a fire upon Moab,” “because he burned the bones of the king of Edom into lime.” Edom had his rights; though Edom has been pronounced upon thus severely, yet even Edom was not divested of rights; and because Moab desecrated the tombs, or sought to turn the bones of the king of Edom into an element of profit and personal pecuniary advantage, the Lord will burn him. For the scheme of time is not a scheme of chance. There is righteousness at the heart of things; there is a throne above the stars. Thus in judgment we get comfort; thus in the terribleness of the divine wrath we see the vindication of divine and human rights.

Hear the instance of Judah—“because they have despised the law of the Lord, and have not kept his commandments. . . therefore there shall be fire sent upon them.” Hear the case of Israel—“because they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes.” They turned the Lord’s people into profit, they made chattels of them. They did not see the image and likeness of God on the very poorest human face; and so for a pair of sandals they would sell the poor, for a handful of silver the righteous might go into captivity. Nay more, “they pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor.” Various interpretations of these mysterious words have been given. The one I adopt is that which fixes the meaning as: So covetous are they, that when the poor man has put ashes on the top of his head in sign of mourning, these people want to get those ashes into their own hands, that they may sell them for profit! This is the way of avarice. Is it right to punish such men? Do not fix your attention on the fire and the brimstone and the roaring out of the God of Zion, but fix your attention upon the object which the divine judgment has in view. What were the circum-

stances with which God had to deal? Look at the corruption, and then look at the judgment, and what if, after all, it be found that such judgment under such circumstances is but an act of mercy? These sins can never be got out of the world but by one process. Judgment can never destroy them. The Lord has shown that the sword has no power whatever in bringing things into moral relation, and setting up the sphere and kingdom of spiritual righteousness. Put up thy sword into its sheaf; that piece of iron can do nothing in the way of propagating truth and divine righteousness. Nay, the Lord has proved by his providence that judgment can do nothing towards the conversion of the world. Men may be desolated and sore afraid; they may be swallowed up with water; they may be burned with fire and brimstone as Sodom and Gomorrah, and yet their sin will assert itself, because selfishness is deeper at present than spirituality. All this must give place to a grand spiritual ministry. The conversion of the world is the work of God the Holy Ghost, and God the Holy Ghost does not take of his own, but of the things of Christ—he takes Gethsemane with its sweat of blood; Calvary with its cry of agony; the resurrection with its signals of triumph and victory; the intercession of the risen Priest, as an assurance that the vilest sinner may return from the uttermost places of the earth. It is along this line that the world has to be bettered, reformed, regenerated, sanctified. For Christianity is not a reformation, it is a regeneration; it is not a new cloak, it is a new character. Therefore let us maintain the testimony of the Cross; let us be faithful to those profound evangelical truths and doctrines which take the largest, grandest view of history and of futurity. The work is holy, it is the Lord's work, and the Lord will conduct it in his own way and in his own time; and let us say to him, Lord, the harvest is thine; find the labourers where thou wilt. Lord, here am I, send me; or if some other man will serve thy purpose better, send him, and keep me at home. The Lord choose his own instruments, his own reapers, his own orators and ministers; only dwell in them, qualify them by continual fellowship with God, and make them mighty, not after the withering power of man, but after the power of an endless life; may there in the simplest of them be a mystery which means God's autograph, God's endorsement.

Chapter iii.

THE ACCUSING WORD.

IT is difficult to give attention to accusing words. They do not conciliate ; they do not appease wrath ; they do not draw the speaker and the hearer together in mutually affectionate fellowship. We cry for sweet words, consolatory promises, tender expressions, and we are willing to pay men a price for telling lies that will for the moment soothe the pain that nothing but spiritual surgery can extirpate. It is a charge against the pulpit, the prophetic office, the whole ministerial function, that it will cry, Peace, peace, where there is no peace ; that it will daub the wall with untempered mortar ; that it will prophesy smooth things if it may but be allowed to sit down at the festival of wealth, and enjoy the banquet of mammon. Now and again it does us good to hear the voice of judgment, the tone of rebuke, the criticism of righteousness. When a man comes and offers us this advantage, we may say, " Physician, heal thyself " ; but when any authority that assumes to be divine undertakes to deal with our infirmity, with our iniquity, with our selfishness, it will be wise on our part to hear how far that authority can vindicate its own divinity. It is the glory of the Bible that it never accuses man without disclosing the reason for the accusation. God does not thunder against man because he delights to show his Omnipotence, or exercise the prerogative of deity ; he never simply confounds the intelligence of men ; he comes before his creatures with reasons ; explicitly does he state the bases on which he proceeds in his strange work of judgment, and he first secures the consent of the conscience before he lays his lash on the back of our iniquities. It is not a pleasant vocation to be summoned from the plough and from the fruit-house in order to denounce the sins of the age. The prophets were not called to easy positions ; they were without salary, without

official status granted by kings and councillors ; they were the offscouring of the earth, they were the sensationalists of their day ; there was no name too humiliating to be withheld from them by tongues gifted with the genius of malevolent misrepresentation. All this is forgotten ; all this is lost in our idolatry of respectability. The Jonahs that raved in the streets of the city were accounted mad, and mad they will always be counted ; the men who utter things we do not understand, and do not tax our moral attention, and do not make our home-life uncomfortable, and do not tear to pieces our personal complacency, are men who will be allowed to eat the fat things of prosperity, and lie down on the velvet couch of popularity. Amos was the sensation of his day. He laid about him like one infested with a spirit that could not be quelled. He raved, he shouted, he thundered, he foamed at the mouth ; when men passed him they were glad to escape from the influence of a fanatic. Yet this is the man who is worshipped to-day as an ancient prophet, and whose words are quoted as the basis of discourses which utterly fail to catch the inflation and holy madness of his enthusiasm. The Church loves to have it so. The Church can devour any amount of self-complacency ; to be pricked, to be irritated, to feel the flagellating lash upon the conscience, is not the trick of the Church to-day, is not the luxury of modern piety. Therefore we have distributed our workers ; we have built places in which sensationalists may cry themselves to peace, and we have assigned them positions in their own journalism in which they may utter their maledictions and their benedictions where we do not come under the influence of either. The Church could not to-day receive an Amos ; the ancient prophets could have no place in the modern sanctuary. It is a lie to think that that which was once sensational has ceased to be sensational. If Christ's was not sensational preaching, then the fourfold account of his ministry is a fourfold misrepresentation. When a man's congregation will arise and thrust him out of the synagogue, and take him to a hill in order to cast him headlong down in order that he may be killed—when that experience is described as other than sensational, the church has added to the iniquity of indifference the immorality of not understanding the language in which its own Gospel is declared. To-day no minister is cast down from the top of

a hill ; to-day ministers are applauded in proportion to their ability to bewilder the people, and to so affect their imagination with cloudy presences and rhetorical spectres as to turn their attention wholly and absolutely away from the monitions and claims of conscience.

Now the Lord puts into the mouth of the prophet Amos a style of utterance which never occurred to the unconscious ploughman. The farm servant whom we have just described begins to speak parables in enigmas. In short, hurrying questions, like messages delivered in whispers, the prophet sets forth parable after parable. Not one of the parables is elaborated ; therefore they have been supposed to be mere inquiries. Thus we do injustice to the Word of God. The word "mere," as a term excluding the universe, as applied to any one text, is a piece of practical blasphemy. No one can tell how much there is in any single line of God's book. They are the great interpreters who find everything in one word, who find the universe in the word God, who find infinity and eternity in the same verbal sanctuary ; and they mistake the prophecies who imagine that with lexicon and with history they can tell where prophecy begins and ends. Prophecy begins in eternity and ends in eternity ; and they are not expositors of the word, but robbers of the treasury of Christ, who limit the range of any single spiritual implication of Holy Writ. There has come into the later pulpit instruction of young students a fallacy, a most mischievous sophism, which is depriving the ministry of some of its noblest attributes, and robbing it of some of its larger possibilities of usefulness. The fallacy is that men can read into the Bible something that is not in it. That is only possible when the something read into it is either, first, iniquitous, or, secondly, is wanting in magnanimity. Whoever reads into the Bible anything that patronises shortcoming of a moral kind is not an expositor, but a debaser of Holy Scripture ; and whosoever reads into the Bible anything that is exclusive, sectarian, bigoted, and to the disadvantage of the millions of the ages, is not an expositor, he is a liar. Whoever finds in prophetic words, or apostolic reasonings and benedictions, new and higher heavens, broader and brighter skies, poesies too large and tender for human words, is not reading something into

the Bible, but is operating along the prophetic line, is pursuing to still fuller issue apostolic meaning; and it is the gift of God in that man that he sees the flower in the seed, the golden harvest in the handful of grain, and all the glory of Bashan in one poor-looking little acorn. When the florist takes a flower of one kind and a flower of another, and so treats them as to bring them into unity, and produce an almost third quantity in floriculture, he is not reading something into nature, he is developing something that was in nature before he was born, something that was in the *Let there be*, the fiat that made nature God's lower sanctuary. So there shall arise in the ages to come men who will so treat the prophets and the apostles, Moses and the Lamb, as to show that the Bible was not a full-grown garden, but a great seed-house in which was all manner of seed, to be reverently, lovingly, faithfully handled and distributed and applied, until it spread itself in blushing flower, in tender beauty, in sacred bloom, in infinite fruitfulness over all the spaces of human imagination and human service.

So regarded, these inquiries of Amos become pictures in germ, parables in protoplasm, the very beginning of those educational exercises that challenge the imagination, and lure the fancy beyond the gates that are never shut; the gates that are closed, indeed, but which will fall back in the far-away blue horizon the moment they are tapped by him that knocks reverently, and with the persistence of devoted love. Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. It hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive all that God has laid up in the Bible. When the word-splitter has done, then the greater annotator takes up the work, and carries it to nobler issues and applications. The dictionary has a work to do in the exposition of the Bible. No wise man will lightly dismiss the word-critic; the lexicographer may also be an ally and a fellow-worshipper, but after he has arranged the words, and set them in their grammatical arrangement and perspective, then must come the man who, mayhap, will know nothing of the science of grammar, but having the gift of the spirit, the genius of sympathy, will, out of grammatically arranged materials, make heavens higher than we have ever seen, describe horizons that make the orbits

of any planets small circlets ; and with such men we must move if we would allow our religious imagination to be trained, chastened, and abundantly enriched.

Look at the inquiries : " Can two walk together, except they be agreed ? " No man can tell where that parable ends. First of all, it is generally omitted to point out where it begins. What is the point of the inquiry ? In the first instance it is a point that relates to God. Thus the parable will read : How can I, the living, true, pure, holy God, walk with you when your policies are full of deceit, and the beds on which you lie have been stolen from the poor ? The inquiry has been narrowed down to merely human limits, as if it were a question relating to passing fellowships, transient acquaintances, ecclesiastical relationships ; as if it amounted simply to reciprocity of opinion ; as : Two men think alike, and therefore they may belong to the same religious community ; two men think alike, and therefore they may expel a third man who has the temerity to differ from them ; two men have so appropriated God and all God's universe, that if any man shall attempt to take an inch of either without first consulting them, they will combine that they may anathematise and then destroy him. This is not the meaning of the passage in any sense. There is no requirement of uniformity of opinion anywhere in God's book. Blessed be God ! the Lord knows that in the matter of opinion his creatures, shaped in his own form, must have boundless liberty. No two men can think alike, can be identical in opinion, or in intellectual judgment. Thank God, the Lord knew this, and therefore he called around him, when he came in the form of his Son, men of all kinds and grades of intellect, and all degrees of fancy and of mental power and of moral habitude, that they might in their twelvefoldness show that the way into the city is by a twelvefold gate, and that the Gospel looks in all directions, and has something to say to every man in the tongue in which he was born. The inquiry, however, does relate to moral considerations. How can the honest man and the thief be partners in the same business ? How can the Christian and the atheist so enter into articles of association that the one man shall be able to say his prayers, while the other man is denying his God and robbing the public ? The question is

severely moral, because primarily it relates to the possibility of God walking with man when man is seeking to do that which is evil. The Lord declares that he can have no connection whatever with bad people. The prayers of the wicked are an abomination unto him; when they make prayers they throw filth in the very face of heaven; when they go to church they defile the golden pavement of the sanctuary; when they open their polluted lips to sing the psalms and hymns of the holy house they attempt, mumblingly and feebly indeed, but certainly, to set falsehood to music. God has left every Church that has left him. Here he states the reason for his abandonment. He says in effect, We are not agreed, and therefore we cannot walk together; you have left me, and therefore I must leave you.

Another parable is in the question, "Will a lion roar in the forest, when he hath no prey? Will a young lion cry out of his den, if he have taken nothing?" Before the lion springs upon his prey he roars as if in triumph, because the prey is delivered to his paw. And so it is with men who are both bad and good; bad men have their seasons of rejoicing over fallen honour, over disenchanted influence, over the downfall of sanctified excellence; but the point of this parable may be, that when the Lord roars from Zion, as we have just seen him doing, he means his very roar to be the beginning of a Gospel. What is the meaning of that roar? It is a warning; and when the Lord warns, the Lord wishes those who are warned to have an opportunity of escaping. When he blows the war trumpet in Zion it is that he may alarm the cowards, not into deeper cowardice, but shame them back to their loyalty and their courage. Thus the Lord uses the trumpet of providence, the trumpet of events. If we had ears to hear we should detect in many a sound in the resonant air the meaning that God is nigh at hand, awaking the sleepers, alarming those who are at ease in Zion. The daily journal cannot exhaust the meaning of providence. Probably there is hardly a daily journal that acknowledges in so many words that there is any providence at all. We require a larger and bolder annotation of events than can be given by merely political seers. The world is not a political club; the world is a school, a scene of discipline, a theatre of preparation and probation; and only the

religious genius, only the prophetic spirit, can interpret the action, the colour, the movement, the suggestion of all that takes place within the limits even of a single day. Encourage every Amos to ask his question. The inquiry may appear sometimes to be feeble, and sometimes to be foolish; it may express to those who do not understand the case the speaker's weakness; but to those who have understanding of the times, and the gift of reading providence, the inquiry of seers, prophets, apostles may be as a key that opens some hitherto unopened gate to admit the age into some larger pasture or wider liberty.

"Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" That is another parable. It is not to be exegetically cleared up, or comprehended and concluded. It opens the whole mystery of the origin and operation of evil. There cannot be a devil in the universe without the Lord having created him. The origin of evil is not the greatest mystery in the universe; the origin of God must ever be the one mystery of all thought. God himself is a greater mystery than can be any mystery that occurs under his throne. It is certain, however, that in this instance we must distinguish between two evils. There is an evil of iniquity, and there is an evil of punishment. There is a wrongdoing, and there is a consequence that follows upon that wrongdoing. The parable may be here limited to the latter interpretation. Can there be evil, of the nature of judgment, punishment, infliction for wrongdoing, in a city, and the Lord hath not done it? The Lord is the chastiser of wrong; the Lord is the author of hell. It is fashionable to turn away with gestures of dissent or of disgust from the mere mention of perdition; but God dug that pit, God filled that pit with fire and brimstone, God made hell; or there is a power beyond him that has turned part of his universe into offensiveness in his nostrils. God could not have a universe such as this universe is in its probationary periods without making in it a hell. We must have houses of punishment, prisons of discipline, jails in which we confine for a time the rottenness of society, that its pestilential influence may be withdrawn from the social atmosphere. What shall come in the ages, who can tell? who knows what God may be doing even in perdition? There we must not follow our

imagination, because we have no explicit revelation to sustain it in its adventures. It is enough for us to know two things: first, thank God, that all evil is burned; and to know, secondly, that God is love, and that his judgment has in it an element of mercy in all history, and therefore may have in it an element of mercy in all futurity. Foolish is he, almost to the point of profanity, who dogmatizes in the presence of this infinite problem. But we may say iniquity deserves to be burned for ever, and we can say, with all the houses of ancient history, "His mercy endureth for ever." We are to recognise God's presence in all the judgments that befall a city. The city is under God's care. The city is a unit as well as the family; the family is a unit as well as the individual, and therefore God deals with the unit in its own way, and after its own measure, and according to its own peculiarities. If there is a pestilence in a land it may be of the Lord's sending; we may have our theories as to disinfection and caretaking and attention to all sanitary regimen and discipline and law—all that may be useful and unquestionably pertinent within given limits; but there are pestilences that sanitation has not explained, there are pestilences that sanitation has never overtaken. Look at the larger explanations and implications, and never be satisfied with thinking that any torch can hold all the light of the sun, or that any human heart, how brilliant and novel soever, can express the decree, or symbolise the full purpose of God.

Thus the prophet continues his noble career, challenging imagination by questions, exciting attention by inquiries, and anticipating Christ's own method of teaching when he spoke a parable, and left it to the people to find out the interpretation. O wondrous beyond all other sights ever set forth in human pictorial representation is the sight of Jesus talking in parable to a hostile audience! They are charmed with the speech; they never heard their language spoken before so purely, pathetically, plaintively, suggestively; but when that wizard speaker comes to a close, and looks round to see the effect of his speech, we read, "They perceived that he spake this parable concerning themselves." So long as it remained a parable, it remained a picture; when it became an application it became a judgment,

and no sooner did these men feel the sting of fire upon their consciences, than they rose, and would have thrust down to death the speaker who enchanted their imagination.

When will Amos return? When will the Son of man send a vicegerent that shall speak in his own tone and represent his own earnestness? Until then the congregation occupies itself in somnolent admiration, and the Church turns itself into an institution devoted to the barren process of mutual congratulation. The church is wrong. All archbishops and bishops, all popes and presbyters, all nonconformist ministers and evangelists, are alike in this condemnation. There does not issue from the pulpit of the church, taking the word Church in its largest explication, that tremendous voice of thunder which is an eternal challenge to all evil, and a perpetual terror to all evildoers. So long as the House of Lords and the House of Commons, so long as the House of Senate and of Congress, and the Body Legislative, so long as the parliaments of all countries can say, "We may do as we like, for the clergy are dumb dogs that cannot bark," we shall have a decadent church; but when the Church in all its departments, in all its sections, is ardent with the fire of the divine presence; when it will overhaul all legislative enactments; when it will discuss them at the altar; when it will dispute over them under the very shadow of the Cross; when bishops, men of learning, presbyters and ministers, men of practical experience and burning eloquence, arise and say, "You shall not damn this nation, unless you do it in the face of our protest,"—when that day comes, know ye that the Lord has come. Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly!

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, it is a fearful thing to fall into thy hands when thou dost arise to judge the earth; yet God is love, and it is better to fall into the hands of God than into the hands of men. Thou dost not willingly grieve or afflict thy children. Judgment is thy strange work, mercy is thy delight; in wrath thou dost remember mercy, and even in thy judgment thou callest to mind that we are but dust. Who can stand before the Lord when he ariseth? Who can answer the thunder of the Most High? When thou dost plead against us with all thy power behold we wither away; but thou comest to us in gentleness, in pity, in tears, in redeeming compassion. If we will rend our hearts and not our garments, if we will make confession of sin, and cry unto the Lord for pardon at the Cross of Christ, and for the sake of his work, behold all heaven is not enough for us, thou dost fill us with gladness and promise us immortality. We thank thee for all thy light and care, thy wisdom and strength, thy grace all-healing, all-conquering; and for the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, profitable to direct, and working in us evermore the miracle of sanctification. Good is the Lord; the will of the Lord be done, the judgment of the Most High be turned aside by the work of the Saviour, and all the tenderness of the Cross be revealed unto us that we may not die in the darkness of despair. We pray at the Cross; we sing at the Cross; we remember and forget our sins at the Cross. O hear us in heaven thy dwelling-place, and when thou hearest, Lord, forgive! Take away from us thy rebuke, and hide not thyself from our petition. Amen.

Chapter iv.

MORAL DEGRADATION.

"Hear this word, ye kine of Bashan, that are in the mountain of Samaria, which oppress the poor, which crush the needy, which say to their masters, Bring, and let us drink" (ver. 1).

DAVID speaks of bulls—"bulls of Bashan." Amos speaks of "kine"; another word, with subtler meanings, which cannot be expressed in terms. The whole people had sunk into sensuality. To say they were distinguished by effeminacy is to expose a word innocent in itself to false interpretations. The whole society spoken to by the reproachful prophet was sunk in the worst forms of selfishness and baseness. This farm servant does not choose his words with any view to consulting the taste of his hearers. He must get at their attention.

When a man is determined to arrest the attention of the public he must not be too particular in the use of terms, or the use of words only that are permitted in the court of perverted and fickle taste. There are prophets who are speaking to the taste of the age, and the taste of the age takes no heed of their mincing words. They are not prophets, therefore. They have on the official robe, and they stand upon the official floor, but they are not prophets, because they do not use words that burn their way into the attention of the heart and the judgment. This farm servant, this field hand, comes crashingly down amid the corruptions of his day, and looking upon the wealthiest men lounging in their divans of ivory, nicely cornered where no draughts can reach them, and calling for more drink, he says, "Ye kine of Bashan"—ye filthy women, men—"hear this——" It was well for Amos that he was not a farmer, but only a labourer. He would have been evicted. Poverty can be independent, skill can be courageous; a man who has a living in his fingers has no favours to ask; it is only the gentleman who cannot make his own living who has to beg some other people to let him live. Amos did not say, Gentlemen, nobles, aristocrats, feudal lords; he said, "Ye kine of Bashan." He addressed them as if they had gathered in a stable which itself had not been cleansed for a century, the very air of which reeked with pestilence. We must not send dainty men to do rough work; instruments must be adapted to the function which is demanded of them. There are those who cannot listen to speakers whose voices rise above the level of a whisper. By all means let such people have such gospel as they can receive; but an age marked by avarice, cupidity, oppressiveness, self-indulgence, and every form of evil, must listen to voices often grating, crashing, thunder-like, and carrying with no uncertain emphasis the express and direct judgment of God.

What is the charge against these fallen ones? They "oppress the poor," they "crush the needy." Yet, reading between the lines, and in the light of the day in which this history was written, it is perfectly possible that all this oppression and crushing was done secondarily, so that the men who were guilty of it did not personally and immediately know what they

were doing. Does that relieve them of responsibility? Not one whit. The men in question curtained themselves in their divans, lounged at ease, dreamed the devil's nightmare, enjoyed themselves in all the range and gamut of evil aspiration, and allowed others to crush the needy. There are those who find it convenient not to see all that they are doing; there is a sense of grim comfort about drawing the curtain around one, and letting all manner of oppression and crushing and evil-doing be conducted without our personal cognisance of the ghastly facts. This is the charge against the once-called people of God. Is it an ancient charge? Is it a reminiscence that requires a very skilful historian to recall in all its particularity and applicableness? Verily this is the iniquity of to-day. The senior partner does not know what the junior partner is doing; can the senior partner therefore preside over a Christian assembly, and talk pious twaddle, without being responsible for what his more energetic coadjutor is doing? Let him answer the question before he touches the altar in prayer, before he puts to his lips the blood of sacrament. Are they guiltless who leave a church, a country, a family, and so long as they can reap profit enough for their own advantage, care nothing how that profit is extorted from those who are oppressed? If the throne of God is holy, there is a dark day of answering for all such traitors and all such unfaithful souls. It is convenient to have some inner chamber, in which seniority can rest, and whence it can call for more drink, more luxury, more gold, no matter at what cost; but God's fire will find its way into that innermost chamber, and burn it. Blessed be the name of the Judge, for he is interested in the poor; the case of the needy is his. Wherever there is oppression he hates it, and when men seek to sanctify robbery he calls it robbery, and throws it into hell. We need some blunt Amos to talk to us in our mother tongue. The moment he becomes rhetorical he becomes insincere; yet he must create a ritual of his own, noble, massive, resonant, marching through his audience as if by right—intellectual, moral, divine right. You are bound to know how your servants are living. You are called upon by the God of Amos to find out how much you are giving to the least little boy in your establishment. If you are giving a thousand a year for the conversion of people you never saw, and

are starving your own apprentices and *employés* and servants at home, you are bad. If thou say, "I knew it not," God will condemn thee out of thine own mouth. Why read reports of things five thousand miles away, and not know that a man in your own employment is at this moment dying of consumption, has a wife and four or five little children, and hardly a coal in the grate, and not much bread in the cupboard? You are bound to stop your carriage at his door, and save him from destroying hunger. That may make no impression in the public halls of the kingdom, but it will be written in the Book of Life, and in the other book, one day to be read aloud by the Judge, the inconsumable record written in heaven. What Amos dare tell us these things? Lord, send him! He will be crucified, but thou wilt receive him to glory.

"The Lord God hath sworn by his holiness" (ver. 2).

Then it is a moral controversy. Nothing short of the holiness of God is pledged and involved in this argument. God does not swear by his majesty, but by his character. It is because he is holy he is going to take this action. Whenever holiness is interested in a controversy, know that the most obstinate and persistent force known to human nature is engaged in the strenuous contention. Always be afraid of an opponent who is working along the line of a noble character. The religious man is the most determined opponent of evil. The political economist is a calculator, an arranger; he thinks that perhaps the operation of evil had better be suspended, because it interferes with the adjustment of the comings and goings, exports and imports, and internal statistics. He will give way under pressure. Holiness never gives way. Fire will not give in, and the fire of the divine heart is enlisted against all men who oppress the poor and crush the needy. Find a man who is a politician, who operates only from political considerations, and he will be here to-day and there to-morrow; he will listen to know what is being said; he will calculate and arrange and adjust, and see how balances run, and listen to the eloquence of averages. Find a man whose conscience is alive, whose very mind has become a moral organ, whose whole soul is committed to the cause of right, and he will never yield; he cannot be changed, he is a representative of an eternal

principle and an unchangeable standard. What we need is moral conviction. We have intelligence of a certain kind in plenty. We want the conscience to be enlisted, intelligently, thoroughly, passionately. When conscience takes up the cause of truth, that cause will be heard of in many languages, will be seen in many aspects, will be confronted in unexpected places. Conscience has been lost. The Church is without conviction ; and a creed without conviction is a corpse. The Lord is not so arrayed against wrongdoing that we have to appease his passion ; he is so arrayed against evil that we have to satisfy a moral judgment. God will have that which is right. Until the right is done nothing is done. In vain we decorate the walls if the foundations are destroyed. The Lord will have nothing done to the walls until the foundations are put in course. Decoration is nothing to him who appointed the heavens, and flushed the summer with colour, and made all nature an infinite loveliness. He does not look for our paint. He admires our solidity, massiveness, rectitude. We serve a holy Master : "Be ye holy as your Father in heaven is holy."

The farm servant now begins to speak in a tone of irony. It is wonderful how all these farm servants and others became suddenly and completely educated in the very highest style of human eloquence. These burning, blasting utterances might, so far as their rhetorical structure is concerned, have been fabricated by trained heads. The Lord will educate his own ministers, and abundantly qualify those whom he has honoured. God never sends his servants abroad empty-handed ; he will have them stand still, and be his instruments through whom he may thunder judgment, or through whom he may whisper benediction. When will men let the Lord alone ? When will the Church allow some scope to inspiration, and some opportunity for divine providence to vindicate itself ? When will the Church learn to be reverently decent ? We do not make one another ; God makes us all. Now we shall hear irony that might have been spoken by Elijah.

"Come to Beth-el, and transgress [You are quite equal to it ; come and dance on the church-floor, come and turn the sacrament board into a festival of rioting] : at Gilgal multiply transgression [Around the altar weave the

web of iniquity, and carry on your madness under the sky of God]: and bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes after three years: and offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, and proclaim and publish the free offerings" (vers. 4, 5).

What a partial programme! how well it reads, and yet how rotten it is at the heart of it! A sacrifice every morning, tithes after three years, sacrifice of thanksgiving, proclaim and publish the free offerings! There is one thing wanting in all that elegant programme, and for want of that one thing the whole arrangement dies in the air like a gilded bubble. What is omitted from this rehearsal? The sin offering, the trespass offering. They will come with sacrifices every morning as donors to God; they will come with service and sacrifices of thanksgiving with leaven; they will throw money into the treasury, and announce the sum in plain figures—Where is penitence? Where is contrition? Where is heart-wringing? Where is the tearing conscience, the presence of tormenting agony in the innermost life? Most worship is partial; many will have a little partial religion. Some attention has to be paid to custom, to the habit, wont, and use of life; some mean coin must at least be thrown into the treasury, and thrown in with some ostentation; hymns must be sung, and fault must be found with the music, and judgment must be pronounced upon the rabbi, the priest, the teacher for the time being, and for a certain period there must be an odour of sanctity about what we say and do. All this trickery is possible; but it never reaches the heaven of God. Such doing does not amount to conduct; it does not go beyond the boundary of calculation and selfish adjustment. Not the sweetest song is accepted if its sacrifice be but a song. The publican, broken-hearted, crushed, wounded in the soul, crying, God be merciful to me a sinner! sings in his sob, praises God loudly and sweetly in the very utterance that is choked; when he has experienced the mercy he will rise like a liberated bird, and sing at the gate of heaven. Beware of formality, of partial worship, of doing in the church only those things we like. We like to sing; we like to hear some particular voice that charms or rouses, that soothes or encourages us; we like to sit in certain places, and, so far as our partialities go, what can be more decorous and more beautiful than our conduct in the sanctuary? Whereas the Lord, looking upon all these perfunctory

attentions and sapless, bloodless sacrifices, says, I am weary to bear them: go and deal thy bread to the hungry, and lift up the life thou hast crushed, and be reconciled to thine enemy: do justly, love mercy, walk humbly with God; and then thy poorest song shall mingle without discord with the music of angels. When we do what we like to do we are not worshipping God. Unless there be a touch of the agony of the Christ, what we do is unacceptable to God.

Here you have punctuality; here you have thanksgiving; here you have music, and yet the Lord turns it into ironic taunt: "Come to Beth-el, and transgress: at Gilgal multiply transgression: and bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes after three years": be very punctual in your payments; after you have done it all, go home with the charge that you have been found liars before God. When will Amos come to tread us down in the divine wrath, and raise us up when we have confessed our sins and sought the divine forgiveness? To call us—who have been ministers, office-bearers, heads of parishes, and leaders in sanctuaries—men who have been found liars before God, how rough the speech, how violent the incrimination! Surely this cannot be a true impeachment. Men who talk so cannot be saved. Men should ask, Is it true? Have I omitted from my programme the sin offering, the trespass offering, the sign of personal criminality? Am I only a decorator of my external life, or am I seeking to be purified at the wellhead, cleansed at the font of being?

Now the Lord promises to inflict judgment and punishment upon his people. He will give them "cleanness of teeth" in all their places, because they shall have nothing to eat in all their places; and he proceeds to say that all his policy of punishment has failed. He says, after he has told them what he has done in case after case, "Yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord" (ver. 6); "But they were not satisfied: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord" (ver. 8); "Yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord" (ver. 9); "Yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord" (ver. 10); "Yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord" (ver. 11). Mere punish-

ment, even when exercised by the divine Being, can do nothing permanently and really curative. Here you have references to Sodom and Gomorrah and Egypt, to all the plagues that fell upon the people, and yet after all they stood before God with obdurate hearts. It is not in punishment to regenerate society. You cannot subdue a nation even by divine punishment. For God has tried it and has failed. Why should men hope to succeed where omnipotence has succumbed? Something more than punishment must be attempted; there must be education; there must be opportunity created for reasoning; there must be a spirit of judgment not on the penal side only, but on the side of rational debate and consideration.

Then comes a symbolic word. Verse 12 is a picture: "Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel." How? There is no answer. The speaker here strikes an attitude; the attitude is that of an uplifted hand, "Therefore thus." There are many things that cannot be written. The Lord himself calls attention to figures in the sky, to signs in the expressive clouds, to events that build themselves up into pillars—one side all fire, the other delicate and feathery as a cloud. The Lord shows himself apocalyptically, and only because we are blind we allow him to pass by without recognition and grateful hallelujah. Lord, that we might receive our sight! Thou art always near us, but we do not see thee; we are the victims of the body, we are subdued by our own flesh. The flesh warreth against the spirit, and the spirit often shows feeble fight against the flesh. Take not thy Holy Spirit from us. Thou art near, within touch, thou art nearer to us than we can ever be to ourselves,—Lo, God is here, and I knew it not. See the action of providence; note the significance of events; read the signs of the times; standing in the sun is One who says, "Therefore thus." He that hath ears to hear, let him hear; he that hath eyes to see, let him see; these sights are not given to the eyes of the body, they are lavished upon the vision of the pure heart.

" . . . And because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel " (ver. 12).

How often have these words been turned into words of terror; how many noble discourses have been preached from this text

which had no relation whatever to its meaning ! This is the voice of love. All punishment has failed ; threatened hell has become a familiarity that men listen to and let pass on ; eternal fire, eternal brimstone have become figures in rhetoric, tropes in poetry—what now is to be done ? Something larger, nobler—"Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel." "Prepare : " there is forewarning. When God forewarns he means to give us every opportunity of repentance ; if he were not determined upon giving us every opportunity he would plunge upon us without warning, and carry us away as a flood in the nighttime. The very word "prepare" so used in this relation is itself a gospel term. "Prepare to meet thy God"—still "thy God." Men give up God, but does God give them up ? They forget that there is a double relation. There be atheists and agnostics and non-theists and secularists who have made up their mind to renounce the whole idea of God, but God has not made up his mind to renounce them. Christ's Cross still stands ; Calvary is just where it ever was ; the great evangelic thought of redemption by the blood of Christ is the music of the universe, is the security of things eternal. So God will not renounce us, or cast us off, or allow us to be cut down, until he has pleaded with us, and we have to cut our way from him ; and at last even he will say in the words of his Son, blessed, eternal Saviour,—I have lost none but the son of perdition ; I would have saved him too, but he would not be saved. Imagine not that God is moved by your fickle changefulness. You may have renounced God, but God has not renounced you. Men sometimes say that they have been obliged to give up Christianity ; and we find it is not Christianity at all they have given up, but some church creed, some metaphysical, bewildering, superstitious nonsense that they have given up, and thank God they have given it up. All these things ought to be raked together, and burned !

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, thy throne is established in the heavens, and thou thyself reignest calmly in Zion. Thou dwellest in peace; thou dost sit above the circle of the earth; thou lookest upon all the children of men as they come and go, and behold, as compared with thine own eternity, they are as shadows that abide not. We rest in thy care, we stand in thy strength. Thou art the Ancient of Days, and the Eternal King: blessed are they who have a place in thy house; they will be still praising thee;—in the darkness they will see the Lord, far away they will know his coming, and near at hand they will hear his voice. We bless thee for all this consciousness of thy nearness, thy love, thy care, thy mighty defence; may we so grow in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ as to be no longer tossed about, wearied and worn and distracted by all the tumults of time. May we rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him, and abide under the shadow of the Almighty, and dwell in the tabernacle of eternity; then shall we not see when fear cometh, the cloud will be no frown, the gathered storm will fall in blessing upon our garden, our heritage shall then be fruitful, and our song unto the Lord shall every morning be new. Blessing and honour and glory and power be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever. Amen.

Chapter v.

MORAL DISCIPLINE.

“Hear ye this word which I take up against you, even a lamentation, O house of Israel” (ver. 1).

THIS is a dirge. It is as if a man were present at his own burial, hearing the solemn words, “Ashes to ashes, dust to dust;” the whole lot over, the whole tale run off, its very last syllable uttered, whispered, and all this poor little cloud-life behind;—a dirge, a lamentation, a wail as of the heart. That may be beautiful, or it may be lacking in every line of beauty and every tone of music. There is nothing to regret about vanished life. Some men are longing to see the other side, the completing time, the perfect place, the city that hath foundations. They have had enough of it at present; they are wearied with its monotony; it

is to-day and to-morrow and the third day—all a repetition of yesterday ; a coming and going of clouds, a rising and falling of prospects, promises, hopes, a stinging of disappointment, a gratification that becomes sour in the mouth : they want to see the other side.

But this is a dirge over a fallen house, the more fallen that it is spoken of in the feminine gender : “The virgin of Israel,”—beauty withered, promise come to nothing but fruits of darkness, and all the favour, all the grace of God lost in an ineffable disappointment of the divine heart. Then the dirge is not beautiful ; its plain-tiveness is like the sigh of a great sorrow that cannot rise to the relief of words. How is it to be with our life ? We too live, we also must die ; what shall be said of us ? Shall it be a broken column that is put on our last resting-place ? Not necessarily and poetically indicating youth, but meaning that the life was broken, its noblest purposes thwarted, all that looked loveliest about it in childhood lost. How fair the morning was in some cases, how tender the dawning light ! Parental eyes looked upon it, and filled with tears as they saw all the beauty come and go ; and then the clouds gathered, and the noonday was premature night. Every man must answer the question himself. It lies in the power of every man to insult and dishonour God ; it lies in the power of every man to increase the song that swells the fame of Jesus.

Now the Lord will be gracious. He adopts a word, and repeats it—a word full of evangelical importunity, and also full of the spirit of evangelical monition and warning. How did Amos come by this word “Seek” ? It is Isaiah’s word ; it suited his mouth well ; his were evangelical lips, they were full of the gospel of reconciliation and peace and offered pardon. Here comes a rough blunt speaker, a cowherd rather than a shepherd. Some have tried to make Amos a shepherd—which indeed he was in some partial degree, but he was in reality and fully a cowherd. Yet he takes up Isaiah’s word, and represents the Lord as saying, “Seek ye me, and ye shall live ; . . . seek not Beth-el. . . . Seek the Lord, and ye shall live.” Isaiah said, “Seek ye the Lord while he may be found ; call ye upon him while he is near.” The

blessed Saviour said, "Seek and ye shall find." He represented himself as a seeker; he said, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." Does this word seeking indicate something that is perfunctory, easily done; that may be accomplished in some offhand or careless way? The word itself is full of burning energy. "What woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?" She seeks for the piece that was lost, not leisurely, easily, occasionally, now and again as the mood may change, but she makes it the one business of the moment; she has time for nothing else, she is sensible of incompleteness and loss and indignity, and she must find the piece, though it be but the tenth, that was lost. We have to seek wisdom as men seek for silver and for hidden treasure, for gold far down in the earth. That is the true seeking. Many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able, because they may not seek in the right spirit, or they may seek at an hour too late; the seeking is lost, either for want of energy, or because the Lord hath arisen and hath shut to the door. How have we sought the Lord? Intellectually, speculatively, metaphysically? Have we asked many questions concerning him to which intellectual answers might be given? or have we gone to his door and said, Never more do we leave this door until it be opened from the inside? Then we did not wait too long. On the door is written, "Knock, and it shall be opened unto you," and on the pathway that leads up to the door is written, "Seek, and ye shall find."

Observe the element of energy that alone distinguishes this word. It is the energy that has been wanting in our quest. We have not been wholly irreligious, we resent the suspicion or suggestion of being irreligious—that never occurred to our mind; we were only too willing to acknowledge the existence of God, if by intellectual assent we could escape moral responsibility. No man can have much objection to a metaphysical deity; it is when God comes down to search the heart and hold inquest in the life, it is when he tries the reins of the conscience, that we hate him. How have we sought the Lord? With one hand have we knocked at his door when we ought to have thundered upon it

with both, like men who have made up their minds not to be refused. How long have we tarried at his altar? Have we said our prayer, or prayed it? That is the difference. Have we mumbled words, or have they gone out of us, carrying with them virtue, energy, passion, vehement yet loyal determination? The Lord will not be found by those who seek him otherwise than with their whole heart. He does not stand for cross-examination by the intellect; he is not to be victimised by clever interrogators; he does not offer himself to be analysed or criticised by the mere intellectual faculty; he will halt nowhere but at the door of the broken heart; he will answer no question that is not marked by the modesty and trembling of the contrite spirit. In all this sanctuary life, study, service, spirit goes for everything. Not the much speaking, but the great speaking, brings God to our aid.

There is a seeking that is condemned in this very connection. To the indication of that seeking these remarks have led us:—

“Ye who turn judgment to wormwood, and leave off righteousness in the earth, seek him that maketh the seven stars and Orion” (vers. 7, 8).

This is a vice and this the iniquity of to-day. The people were not atheists, but they turned God into a deity. It is that word “deity” that shocks him; it is too fine, too remote from the heart’s need; one of those dainty words that men cannot use when they are in earnest. Israel did not regard the universe as self-made, but Israel was content to worship nature. Israel said, Show me the Pleiades, the seven stars, the angel lights of spring; how lovely, oh, how diamond-like; how beauteous in their white loveliness! Yea, Israel said, I will look upon belted Orion, star of the winter solstice. How grand, how noble! I could worship that rough austere Orion.

Degenerate Israel has many successors. There be those who want to hug the house and neglect the Builder; and the Builder will not have it so. This is a condemnation of nature-worship. If men might be pardoned in any idolatry, surely it would be in the idolatry of the stars. The poets have taken the Pleiades under their patronage. Children early ask, when they begin to read the open heavens, Where are the Pleiades? Which is the

Milky Way? Show us the evening or the morning star. There is a kind of religiousness about that. So to-day men have left the Church to go and worship the open primrose, the flowing stream, the trilling, singing bird; and they have gone into raving over the noonday sun; as for night, they have made her blush by their praises. The Lord will not have these compliments. He says, introductorily, All these little eulogiums come out of a rotten heart; ye who have turned judgment to wormwood, and left off righteousness in the earth, ye have become mere star-worshippers. What easier, what cheaper, what less disciplinary? Having killed judgment, and stabbed righteousness, let us go out and look at the Pleiades, and wonder at the majesty of Orion. Even nature cannot be worshipped by the iniquitous spirit. Where the moral self is dead the worshipping self is dead also. Even though that worship be offered to a stone, the stone coldly rejects the adoration. For the stones are God's; all the pebbles belong to him, all the tiny shells on the seashore, that try in their impotent way to mimic the roar of the ocean, are all in God's bottle, they belong to the One Proprietor. Yet how noble it looks, and specially how intellectual, how consistent with dandyism and worldliness, selfishness, and all manner of littleness it is to be fond of the Pleiades. All this, observe, has been anticipated, discounted, set down at its value in the inventory which God takes of all the universe. We are tempted to leave men who preach to us and pray for us, that we may go out and look at nature. We then go from the greater to the less. There is no little child that babbles its first half-music of words that is not greater than the biggest Orion that ever flamed in the heavens; there is no man, be he deaf, dumb, blind, poor, almost neglected by death, as if it could not condescend to his sepulture, that is not of more worth than all the worlds that glitter in the crown of night. This is the view which Jesus Christ takes of human nature. Surely the man is not a great man, a great speaker, a mighty suppliant; surely there are men who are greater than he is in intellectual capacity and in various quality of mind and soul; and yet somehow by a call not earthly he has to say to the world what nobody else can say; he is the minister of the Cross. We condemn his speech, we criticise his manner, and we say, Come, let us climb the mountain, and blow kisses

to the Pleiades, and say, O sweet stars, we hail you, and let us leave this word-beggar (as they called the Apostle Paul in Athens) to rave about Jesus and the resurrection. But the preacher will outlive them all. The preacher cannot be killed. So long as he is faithful to the Cross, so long as he yields himself not to his own invention, but to God's inspiration, he abides evermore, and will be most a man when most needed.

It will be profitable still further to dwell upon the cause of this worship of nature.

"Ye who turn judgment to wormwood, and leave off righteousness in the earth" (ver. 7).

This is the reason why men leave the Church. It is not the reason upon the surface; it is never pleaded as the reason. A man has perverted righteousness, and then he leaves the sanctuary that he may escape upbraiding. When you find a man so intellectual that he cannot sing the old hymns and listen to the old discourses, know that that man has somewhere broken down morally. Not in any vulgar sense of crime; he may be outwardly as respectable as ever, he may himself be hardly conscious of the break-down; but he has gone down in moral quality at some point. A man who loves judgment and upholds righteousness cannot dine upon the Pleiades, or fill his soul when Orion; he must have moral satisfaction, spiritual impulse and inspiration; he must put aside every intervening star that he may get at the central sorrow of the universe, the Cross or the ever-slain Lamb. Were we not supported by history we should accuse ourselves of severity in this judgment. But we are supported by experience. We know human nature. Throughout this chapter the Lord insists upon moral discipline. If any one had an interest in the worship of the Pleiades it would be the Maker of them; he set those seven stars in their places, and it might delight him that any one of his creatures lifted up wondering eyes from the earth, and fixed them upon the glowing cluster, and said, How lovely! But the Lord—let us renew the affirmation—will not have it so. What will he have? "Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live. . . . Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate."

The Lord will have righteousness, judgment, equity, good conduct. When he sees men treading down the poor—for verse eleven represents a continuous action: “Forasmuch therefore as your treading is upon the poor, and ye take from him burdens of wheat”—he says, I will not hear you. No worshipper must walk over dead bodies that he may say his prayers at some altar; no man must come to sing a psalm with mechanical exactness while he has left a man outside whose wounds he might have healed. But is it not enough that we say, O Pleiades, how lovely! O stars of the Milky Way, how bright and gleaming? The Lord says, Whilst your heads are lifted up to the stars your feet are set upon the necks of the poor, and I will not have you in my sanctuary. The Lord will not allow us to take holy sacrament until we have been away to see the man whom we have wronged; when our hands are put out towards the symbolic flesh, he says, Touch it not; go out and do that which is right, then come back and eat this bread from heaven. When Israel leaves the trespass offering, and the sin offering, and the very spirit of sacrifice, and begins to rave about the beauties of rainbow and star and dawning morning, the Lord says, Go out and do that which is right, then come back, for otherwise you insult the heavens that you attempt to praise. The wonder is that all men do not instantly yield themselves to the spirits of the Bible, because it insists upon judgment and righteousness, equity, fairness, generosity, purity, nobleness.

In the midst of all this entreaty and expostulation there occurs an admonition significant in all times: “Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord!” What is the meaning of such a *woe*? The meaning is that the people supposed the day of the Lord would avenge them. Their notion was that the day of the Lord would be a dark outlook for their enemies; they were going up and down the land, saying, When the day of the Lord comes, then we shall get our rights, then we shall be vindicated; when the day of the Lord comes, then our respectability will be established, and we shall be promoted to high places in the universe. The prophet says, Do not tempt the day of the Lord: it will be an awful day for everybody—a day of

searching, of penetrating inquest ; it will leave nothing unturned or unexamined. Do not suppose that the day of the Lord will all be in your favour ; whilst you are criticising other people, the Lord himself is criticising you, and every arrow he sends falls into your heart, and will rankle there until his own hand shall extract it. Yet there are people who suppose that all the arrangements of providence have been made more or less in their favour and in favour of their family ; they regard the day of judgment as the day on which all their ancestry will be brought up to their proper places, and all their respectability will be not only vindicated, but enlarged and glorified, and then people will see what wonderful excellence has been despised. Amos says, Let me hear no such partial criticism. Amos does not speak his own word, but the word of the Lord ; he says, Many shall be last who are first, and many shall be first who are last, and the adjustment and classification must be left in God's hands. Wondrous Book ! Holy Bible ! When the poor man has no counsel it stands up and says, I will be his advocate. When the dumb man cannot speak for himself, the angel of the book comes forth and says, I will open my lips for the dumb. When oppressed men stoop because their lives are crushed out of them, the Lord takes up their defence, and he sends a fire upon the palaces of the wicked.

Now the Lord by the mouth of his prophet resorts once more to parables in the form of questions : "Shall not the day of the Lord be darkness, and not light ? even very dark, and no brightness in it ?" This is an appeal to conscience. The Lord never allows judgment to go until conscience has spoken. What will the day of the Lord be to you ? What have you done in advance with regard to the day of the Lord ? How have you prepared yourselves for it ? What has been all your previous life ? When you awaken on the morning of inquest, how will you stand before the universe ? But Israel had not neglected the outer services ; Israel had preserved a certain religious semblance. The Lord knew that, and remarked upon it in words that are blunt, definite, unmistakable in their moral severity : "I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and

your meat offerings, I will not accept them : neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs " : literally, Take them from me. The figure is that of burdening the Lord, laying all the sacrifices upon him again and again, and he says, Take them off, unburden me. The Lord will carry no weight ; but in his heart you may hide all your sin and all your grief. He will not have anything superimposed upon him, but if you approach him contritely, penitently, lovingly, he will take all your sorrow, and carry all your sicknesses,—“Casting all your care upon him : for he careth for you.” A mechanical piety loads and distresses God ; a spiritual worship satisfies the soul of Christ. What wilt thou have, then, thou Judge of all the earth ? what shall it be ? Thou wilt not have our worship of the Pleiades and of Orion ; thou wilt not have our offerings and our sacrifices wherewith we load thee. What wilt thou ? The answer is here : “Let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.” Then the Lord will come near. He will have nothing to do with our wrongdoing, our upbuilding of iniquity, our vindication of oppression. Our vindication may be eloquent ; it may excite the applause of listening senates, people all over the world may cheer it with acclamation ; but the Lord will not have anything that has wrong at the heart of it. Take out that worm, heal that interior iniquity : “Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.” An evangelical word, charged with all the mystery of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost ; charged with the eternal mystery of salvation by the blood of Christ. If you ask the question, What is it to be born again ? you will have the answer. God can answer in many ways and in many tones. He can fill the very air with replies to the inquiries of the heart.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou art every day showing us thy goodness ; therefore thou wilt one day show us what we may be able to bear of thy glory. Goodness and mercy have accompanied us all the days of our life ; we cannot remember one day of orphanage, forsakenness, and cloud without a break. Every morning thou dost give us a new song ; every eventide thou dost rewrite the covenant of thy faithfulness. Thy mercies bedew all the hours. How good is the Lord, yea, how great in love and great in pity ; how thou dost stoop over the children of men, how thou dost gather the lambs in thy bosom. Thou art Father, Shepherd, Redeemer ; thou art the Physician of the sick, and thou findest balm for those who are in utterest despair. Thou dost not withhold thy Son, and he is the pledge of all other gifts ; in the Cross all gifts are little, yea, heaven itself is nothing after Calvary ; because thou hast freely given thy Son to us, thou wilt also with him give immortality and heaven and all glory. But herein is love ; this is the noonday of thy pity and mercy, thy compassion and love ; we see it all on Calvary. He was wounded, was our Saviour, for our transgressions ; he was bruised, was this Son of man, for our iniquities ; the chastisement of our peace was upon our Kinsman, and by his stripes we are healed. We know not the mystery of all this love and righteousness, this law and mercy ; it is enough that thou dost know, living, loving, eternal Father. Thou hast sent a voice of judgment amongst the children of men ; thou hast never been complacent with unrighteousness, injustice, cruelty, wrong, darkness, oppression ; thou hast thundered against them in great blasts and tempests from Zion ; the Lord hath roared through the ages, and his voice has ever been against the children of wickedness. And thou dost smile upon those who endeavour to serve thee, who put their hands in thine, and say, with childlike tenderness and perfectness of trust, Lord, lead me : I am little, I am ignorant, I am blind, lead me day by day, and tell me when to open my eyes, for when thou dost say, Open thine eyes, behold we shall see God and heaven. Amen.

Chapter vi. 1-6.

“ Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria, which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came ! Pass ye unto Calneh, and see ; and from thence go ye to Hamath the great : then go down to Gath of the Philistines : be they better than these kingdoms ? or their border greater than your border ? Ye that put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near ; that lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the

lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall; that chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of musick, like David; that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph."

SOCIETY CHALLENGED.

THIS cowherd keeps on his way well. He is not all subdued up to this moment. We saw how he began in a high, clear, resonant voice of judgment and criticism. Not one tone has yet been softened. The voice is as clear as ever; the judgment has never faltered. Amos has never trifled with the standard; he began with righteousness, and he has never been tempted to change the court of appeal.

"Woe to them that are at ease in Zion" (ver. 1).

But is not ease a sign of contentment? Is not ease indicative of satisfaction? Is not repose the highest aspect of power? What is there, then, to condemn in the spirit and attitude of ease? To find out the prophet's meaning we must go back to the language the prophet himself used; then the reading will be, Woe to them that are recklessly at ease in Zion—Woe to them that care not; who say, It is nothing to us. "Recklessly at ease" is the literal translation of the prophet's word. This is not mere indifference, not a studied withdrawal from tumult, not some early Cowper sighing for "a lodge in some vast wilderness, some boundless contiguity of shade," because he is weary of this world's story of tumult and worry; this is studied carelessness as to the condition and fate of men. The Bible will never tolerate that hostile view of providence, human education, and human destiny; the Bible insists that we are to be careful about all these things all the time. Where is my brother? What is he doing? How can I help him? Can I lend a hand at carrying the burden which is too much for him? There are those who have hidden themselves away from the calamities of their brethren, have wrapped themselves round with a garment of reckless ease; and the cowherd comes, sends a blasting denunciation after them; he takes the roof off their house, and blows upon them with a whirlwind of righteous indignation. When did the Bible cease to care for men? When did the Bible ever lose itself in ideal contemplation, and withdraw itself from the line of human

want, and sorrow, and pain, and wound, and helplessness? This is the one book in the library that sits up all night with us, that goes the whole road of life step for step with us, and that is tenderest when we are sorest, mightiest when we most realise our own helplessness.

The prophet, speaking representatively, says :—

“Pass ye unto Calneh, and see; and from thence go ye to Hamath the great: then go down to Gath of the Philistines: be they better than these kingdoms? or their border greater than your border?” (ver. 2).

Here he is rebuking another kind of discontentment. He is rebuking those who think they have given up a good deal for God. There are persons who say that if they had only been anything but Christians they would have been millionaires. There are even preachers who say that if they had not in some mysterious hour sacrificed themselves in the interests of the pulpit they might have been driving in a carriage. There are those who say that if they had not given up all for Christ they might have been in the House of Commons or in the House of Lords! The Bible will not have it so. Peter once said to his Lord, “We have forsaken all and followed thee,” and the Lord turned round about him and said, “Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundred-fold, and shall inherit everlasting life.” Where is your little “all” in that boundless ocean of recompense and reward? The prophet, however, will have concrete evidence. He is not content with saying, Your state is as good as it would otherwise have been; he says, Go to Calneh, to Hamath, to Gath; reckon up all the Philistines have, total the sum of benefit accruing to heathenism, paganism, worldliness: cast up the account well, and now tell me how the totals run. Where has the Christian been left short? Where has the good man been at a disadvantage? If in the hand, not in the heart; if in visible and tangible substance, not in the mind,—that wondrous sanctuary of the imagination, by which a man lays hold of all the worlds, and by which he appropriates the whole universe of God, to his spiritual nutriment, his moral satisfaction, and the establishment and consolidation of his truest usefulness. Thus the Lord admits the

principle of competitive criticism and judgment. He submits himself to be so judged. He says, Produce your gods : where are they ? What are their names ? what are their histories ? what have they done ? Are these your gods that are nailed up ? Are these your divinities whose faces are freshly painted ? Are these your trusts, worlds that are far away, and which you worship only on account of their distance and their magnitude ? Where are your gods ? So he descends to another level and says, Where are your advantages ? What has the bad man got that is denied to the good man that is really of true substance, true value, and lasting quality ? We cannot lay God under obligation ; we cannot approach him and say, We have done great honour to the Cross, and but for our largeness and liberality, our faithfulness and constant endeavour, the cause of Christ would have gone down in the world. Never. No cause that is of Christ can go down, except to rise again. Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die. There are moments of recession, moments even of putrefaction ; but the chemistry of nature is operating, and the laws of nature never cease, and the upshot shall be that where there was a seedtime there shall be a harvest. No good word is lost, no true speech is blown away in the heedless wind ; every word that has in it life and music and gospel and hope goes from thee to come back again a thousandfold in music and in strength and in blessedness. The Lord thus drives us out to Calneh, to Hamath, to Gath ; to New York, to Paris, to St. Petersburg, to London ; and he says, Take with you your books ; write down all you see ; cast up the account well ; only be exact, be spiritual, be penetrating, omit nothing ; even the dust is gold ; reckon it, and when thou hast totalled all, tell me, saith the Lord, how stands the account.

The prophet now hurls another denunciation. "Ye that put far away the evil day,"—the day of judgment, the day of the Lord, the day of inquest. They could not destroy that day, but they could postpone it. Is this an accusation limited to people who lived three thousand years ago ? Is there no action of postponement now ? Do we not cause things to be transferred until to-morrow and the day following ? Do we not draw a visor over our faces that in momentary blindness we may do

things we never should have done if our eyes were open, and were receiving the noonday light? This is the practical sophism of life; this is how men throw themselves away. So it is that judgment is put down, and the voice of conscience is silenced, and all the monitions of the better life are stifled. We say, Well—to-morrow; we do not deny the importance of these things. The preacher talks well; in his sentences there are many words that are very valuable; but just now urgency, pressure of another kind is upon us: when we have a more convenient season we will hear this man, he shall unroll his revelations, and tell us what he wants to be and to do. There are men who do not deny the day of judgment, but they have put it off a long way. Nor have they done so merely in an arithmetical sense, for in the language used by Amos there is a tone which indicates that the postponement has been accomplished because the men who accomplish it viewed the day of the Lord with aversion. If we omit the element of aversion we miss the true criticism of the text. To avert is to turn the shoulder upon, to turn away from, to express displeasure, impatience, disgust, fear; never to express joy, welcome, gladness, thankfulness. Bad men have nothing to hope for from the day of the Lord.

“ . . . And cause the seat of violence to come near ” (ver. 3), even in the very act of apparently postponing it. The people here charged postponed the day of the Lord, and in doing so hastened the day of the Assyrian. Men do not take in the double aspect of life; they see only one point in the great circle; they think that if they have postponed the day of judgment they have made all things quiet and smooth, and henceforth all things will run easily, forgetting that no man can put off the Lord without inviting the enemy. They “cause the seat of violence to come near”—the session of violence, the sitting of violence; so that whilst the people were so dealing with God, putting off his day to a long date, the Assyrian was preparing to come down. When we have dismissed God we have opened the door to the invader. He who keeps the door of the nation is God; he who puts a roof over the head of the nation to save his people from desolating winds and rains is God. If we have dismissed the altar we have dismissed providence along with worship.

This is the teaching of history, this is the tone of the prophets; and if it were the tone of the prophets only we might say this is ancient poetry, a fine idealism; but there is a grip upon us that says, The hand of the Lord is as the iron of almightiness. No man ever postponed a prayer without losing a bargain; or if he made his bargain for the moment, and took home his bag of gold, when he opened it there was nothing in that bag but darkness. It is on this basis of life we proceed. History is our evidence, consciousness is our witness; and for any man to break down this witness he must first break down by irrefragable evidence our personal character.

Again the cowherd comes to the charge. He scourges those

"That lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches" (ver. 4).

Literally: Pour out themselves like a libation upon their couches, enjoy luxury to the full; and then he adds,—

"That chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of musick, like David" (ver. 5).

How we shelter ourselves behind great names—"like David," yet not at all David-like. David invented or devised instruments of music that upon them he might discourse to the praise and glory of the all-giving and all-directing God. They prostituted what David devised and consecrated. How often we say, Like the Puritans; like the Reformers; like the Revolutionists; like the Prophets; like David, when we are prostituting what they consecrated or devoted to the service of God. A man may make a lyre, and on it he may play to the devil; a man may paint a picture, and to him it may represent the beauty that fascinates the heart with other than spiritual loveliness, a singular mystery of appeal that in its very silence subtly affects the imagination and subtly wears down the finest quality of the soul. "Like David": we may have David's harp without playing upon it with David's spirit; we may read David's psalms and find no music in them. There are those who could parody David; there are irreverent creatures who could mimic the altar; there is a degeneracy of reverence that finds no God in blooming flower or in singing bird or in radiant morning. We could not fashion

our lives after that sort. We could do so, we could play the beast as well as they. Have they tongues? So have we. Are they gifted in speech? We are not wanting in skill of utterance; we could talk profanity, we could curse society and blast the universe, and show the riches of our vocabulary of blasphemy, but we would not do so; we could be irreverent in the sanctuary, and make a kind of spurious fame by our want of veneration; we prefer silence, solemnity, and the spirit of adoration. These men made musical instruments, and said they were following the example of David. They lied, they dishonoured the immortal dead.

“That drink wine in bowls”—that drink bowls full of wine. The ordinary goblet was too small; the little crystal glass excited but their contempt; their souls were on fire for accursed drink, and they must gulp it out of the bowl. Was that all? Far from it. The bowls that were here used, according to the best criticism, were bowls out of which the blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled. See the priest with his bowl, filled with the blood of sacrifice; see him dipping his fingers, and sprinkling and so consecrating the objects that were specified for such chrism; then see these hell-hounds, their throats all fire, using the very bowls, filling them with poison-wine, and drinking that they might forget their misery. To such degradation men have come. Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. No man may boast against another herein. There are giants in the dust, there are mighty men registered among the lost. A haughty spirit goeth before a fall; pride goeth before destruction. If a man shall boast himself of his personal security, what wonder if his very boastfulness become a temptation and a snare? We are safe in humility, we are secured by self-distrust; for then we go to the munition of rocks, and cry mightily with the tenderness of prayer, “Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe.”

What came of all this outstretching upon beds of ivory, and this pouring out upon couches and divans of luxury? What came of all this eating of the deer, the hart, the roebuck, the fallow deer, and the fat fowls of the poultry-yard? What came of all this drinking out of bowls and anointing with chief

ointments? This came: "They are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph." "Joseph" here is the name that stands for the tribe of Ephraim. All luxury tends to moral insensibility, to social carelessness, to the recklessness of ease which the prophet began by condemning. There are two ways of treating the afflictions of society, and we are well practised in them. The first plan is to regard them as so little that poor people and others can manage the whole administration of the case themselves; we say, These are but skin-wounds; in a day or two they will be healed; these are little questions of momentary irritation and dislocation; in a little while by the poor taking care of themselves all this will be rectified. Drink more! bigger bowls! That is one way. Then the other way, the more philosophical and statesmanlike way, is to say that these evils are so gigantic and overwhelming that it is simply useless to talk about them—drink! more drink! larger bowls! This is what it comes to, not always in the same broad form, not always with the same openness and visibleness of manifestation; but a man cannot overfeed his body without going down in the quality of his soul; a man cannot go down in the quality of his soul without ceasing to care for the souls of other people. A man cannot have his eyes filled with fatness and his whole nature surfeited with plentifulness of luxury without losing spiritual vision, spiritual sensitivity, spiritual bloom and quality; and now speak to him about the young and the poor and the sick and the helpless, and he says, I cannot attend to it now: I leave that to others: I can no longer take interest in public and social controversy—drink! Bring in more wine, more luxury, more fatness from the jungle, the forest, and the vineyard. Shall it come to this? or shall we return to the grand old rule of simple living and high thinking? Not a monastic treatment of the body, but such an elevation of the soul as will make all other things low, poor, insignificant, comparatively worthless? Shall we use the world as not abusing it, or shall we allow the world to outweigh us and crush us and destroy us? To a great question there should be a solemn answer.

Chapters vi., vii.

INTERROGATIVE PARABLES.

WE now come to one of the "Therefore" which are so characteristic of this practical prophet. He builds up his reasoning well; then he plunges into his conclusions. He is emphatically a great preacher, never concluding without a rousing application. We have considered what apostate men have done, and we move into this practical "Therefore" with abundant intelligence. We have seen men recklessly at ease in Zion, and trusting to the mountain of Samaria; we have seen them lying upon beds of ivory, and pouring themselves out upon couches of luxury, ordering the lambs out of the flock that they might increase their fatness. What can we expect the "Therefore" of the prophet to lead to? Shall we strike out the words after "Therefore," and fill the blank as we like? Let us see how far our moral sense replaces inspiration.

The men are apostate. They have gone down so rapidly that they are now drinking wine in bowls consecrated to sacrifice. They are not drinking the wine, they are swallowing it, devouring it: Therefore—they shall be glad and rejoice; they shall be strong and happy; they shall shut the north wind out of their garden; their vines shall be plentiful in fruitfulness, and their day shall be long, warm; yea, the sun shall stand still to admire their enjoyments, and the moon shall halt that she may look down upon the glad festival. Conscience itself would not allow the use of such words. There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding, even where he has not seen the written Bible. With an introduction so immoral we must have a conclusion adapted to it. We cannot replace the words we find here with better; the balance of the chapter is equal. There is a sublimity of style even in describing immorality, and that

sublimity is well-balanced by the sublimity of the denunciation of judgment in which the ardent prophet indulges. The vengeance will be measured by the immorality. We do not know what the immorality is until we receive its punishment. We are not judges of our own actions ; we cannot tell where they begin, how they proceed, how far their influence palpitates and throbs on the lake of being. We must know ourselves by studying providence ; in the blight of the harvest we must see what we ourselves have been ; in the action of the body reduced to a groan of helplessness we must see what sin really means. Sin was never meant to be theorised about, to be defined as a dictionary word, to be treated as a theological term ; it is one of those words that stand apart from speech, gathering up into themselves colours, forces, suggestions, that do not lie within the limited function of word-explainers.

Only history can tell what sin is ; nothing but divine judgment can give you a definition of bad doing. We must watch the desolation if we would know the meaning of certain terms, and know the range of certain actions. Men have shown folly herein, deep and incredible, for they have set themselves to writing books about sin ; as if sin would ever consent to have itself passed through an inkhorn, to be explained by made pen, and by weary incapable hand, that cannot supply its own wants, much less write the tragedy of creation. We must study divine judgment if we would know human sin. The difficulty of the teacher herein is that so many persons are unconscious of sin, and are therefore mayhap the greater sinners. Some do not distinguish between crime and sin. They have not been criminals, and therefore they think they have not been sinners,—as if all the story of life did not lie in the disposition rather than in the action. The action is nothing—a poor impotent hand stretched out to do something it cannot accomplish. The heart is the seat of evil. None knoweth the heart but God. The heart does not know itself ; the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked ; and if there were not a concurrent line called history or providence or judgment, we should never know the real state of the heart. What have we then in books but elaborate mistakes, metaphysics perverted to immoral uses, made to show that there is no sin ;

and in showing that there is no sin metaphysics leave unexplained the penal providences of life, the tremendous devastations that have been wrought by fire and plague and angry skies in every mood of indignation. How are all these to be explained, understood, or received into the line of education, and made to instruct the growing life? Never by any theory that undervalues or mistakes the force of sin. The young cannot enter into this; the life that has been lived in easy frivolity can never understand so grim a doctrine; the girl that has always had her own way and enjoyed herself abundantly at home, and has only had to ask for luxuries in order to receive them, and who has never been tried beyond the point of being called upon to thank her friends for their lavish kindness,—what can she understand of this tragedy? To her, they who preach it must be fanatics, yea, madmen. We must, however, go to the broader history, the larger experience of mankind, and find, not in it alone, but in it as interpreted by divine providence, God's meaning of the term sin.

When the Lord putteth forth the whole of his judgment the desolation is terrible :—

“A man's uncle shall take him up, and he that burneth him, to bring out the bones out of the house, and shall say unto him that is by the sides of the house, Is there yet any with thee? and he shall say, No. Then shall he say, Hold thy tongue [hush]” (vi. 10).

That is God's judgment. There is nothing left but the man's uncle; that is to say, in Biblical language, the man's goel, the man's next-of-kin, whose duty it is to burn the dead body or to bury it; and he shall come to seek the corpses, and shall grope round the sides of the house to know if there are any more dead there, and one shall say in a whispered groan, Hush! “We may not make mention of the name of the Lord,”—either because we have proved ourselves unworthy to take that holy name into our lips, or because the judgment is so tremendous that even to mention the name of the Lord may seem to provoke but a repetition of his wrath. “Hold thy tongue” is a term which is best interpreted by the word, Hush! There is a time when we want no speech, a time when God's wrath has had free play, and is glorified not in destruction, but in the attestation of right. There are times when God himself must define terms and show

us their meaning, and when he is driven to this he writes with a sword, he speaks with a tempest trumpet.

Amos is fond of interrogative parables. We have seen how often he puts a parable into an enigma. Here he has recourse to his favourite method of exposition and suggestion, saying, "Shall horses run upon the rock? Will one plow there with oxen?" Amos was a philosopher before the time. He talks here, though hardly knowing that he is so talking, about the "laws of nature." The passage may be interpreted variously. We may take it for practical purposes as indicating a certain law of cause and effect, a law of fitness of things, a law of possible and impossible. "Shall horses run upon the rock," and break their limbs? "Will one plow there with oxen?"—who can make a plough that will cut rocks? Then there is a law of nature. How easily we assent to that proposition! But how difficult it is for us to understand the term "law of nature" in its larger uses and applications! There are those who are eloquent upon the laws of nature who only talk about those laws on one side or aspect. Is there no law of nature of a moral kind? Has the whole spiritual region of life no law, no philosophy, no genius which represents the fitness of things? Is there not a law of nature which demands that the child shall be filial? Is there not a law of nature which says that there are sovereignties that must be obeyed? Is there not a law of nature which calls for thankfulness as the natural sequence of benefaction? Is there no impulse toward the Eternal? Is there not a law which says to him who would find eternity in time, Set down the goblet, for out of that small vessel thou canst not drink immortality? We talk about these laws of nature as if they were limited, mechanical, ponderable, and such as can be represented in plain figures. Or, if we talk about laws of nature, why not take in all the laws of nature, all impulses, volitions, tendencies, aspirations, dumb strugglings after things above and beyond? Never imagine that the laws of nature are confined to certain mechanical and dynamical actions which are accessible only by the physiologist, or the chemist, or the biologist. There are laws of nature, and it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. It will be hard for thee to turn wrong into right. "The way of transgressors is

hard": that is as certainly a law of nature as any procession of the stars or sequence of the seasons. In talking, therefore, about laws of nature take in all life, all nature, all possibilities of being; then you will not be pedants, but philosophers.

"Thus hath the Lord God showed unto me; and, behold, he formed grasshoppers in the beginning of the shooting up of the latter growth; and, lo, it was the latter growth after the king's mowings. And it came to pass, that when they had made an end of eating the grass of the land, then I said, O Lord God, forgive" (vii. 1, 2).

There is the triune God forming—for the verb should be represented as rather an immediate and continuous action than an action already accomplished. This, indeed, is the key of many passages of Scripture, that the action is still proceeding. God is still forming man out of the ground; God is still creating man in his own image and likeness; God is still forming judgments, and making heavens of reward. The Lord humbles his creatures by the very instruments which he sometimes uses. An army could meet an army; but what soldiery could fight a grasshopper? or what cannon can strike the beast in a vital part? Where is it? What its magnitude? What its weight? What space does it occupy? Give us these data, and we will take them to the mathematician, and he will make elaborate calculations, and shape his weapon accordingly. That cannot be done. There may be a greater population on a green leaf than you find in all England. There may be a larger congregation in a drop of water than ever assembled in a cathedral. The Lord will not send some red-coated soldiery down to fight those apostates; he will make grasshoppers, and in the morning the grass will all be gone. We are told by those who have lived in lands known to grasshoppers and locusts,* and other devouring

* Locusts occur in great numbers, and sometimes obscure the sun—Exod. x. 15; Jer. xlv. 23; Judg. vi. 5, vii. 12; Joel ii. 10; Nah. iii. 15.

Their voracity is alluded to in Exod. x. 12, 15; Joel i. 4, 7, 12, and ii. 3; Deut. xxviii. 38; Psalm lxxviii. 46, cv. 34; Isa. xxxiii. 4.

They are compared to horses (Joel ii. 4; Rev. ix. 7).

They make a fearful noise in their flight (Joel ii. 5; Rev. ix. 9).

They have no king (Prov. xxx. 27).

Their irresistible progress is referred to in Joel ii. 8, 9.

They enter dwellings, and devour even the woodwork of houses (Exod. x. 6; Joel ii. 9, 10).

They do not fly in the night (Nah. iii. 17).

insects, that to-day there shall be fifty acres of luxuriant corn waving in the summer wind, radiant, and beautified by the summer sun, and in less than twenty-four hours it shall be cut off within an inch of the root. By what? By swords? No; there were dignity in dying by a sword; the murder is not so rough, the instrument is long and sharp and silver-handled. By what ministry has this destruction been wrought? There is a tone of contempt in the very enunciation of the name—this is the work of locusts, this is the miracle of grasshoppers.

Amos sees another vision,—

“Thus he showed me: and, behold, the Lord stood upon a wall made by a plumbline, with a plumbline in his hand. And the Lord said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A plumbline. Then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumbline in the midst of my people Israel” (vers. 7, 8).

These words are open to two meanings: I have measured up Israel, and none of it shall be lost; or, I will try Israel by a plumbline, and whatever is out of plumb shall be thrown down. The Lord's government is represented by a plumbline. He will have no leaning pillars; he builds no fancy Pisas; he is not a God of eccentricity. The Lord will have right; he will have the square, the vertical, the exact; he will not accept a rough polygon for a circle. His eyes are flames of fire; he weighs the actions of men in the scales of the sanctuary. The king knows what is written on the wall. Men have made wonderful expositions of “MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN,”—simply meaning, Pounds, ounces, pennyweights. There need be no esoteric meaning about the writing. The king knew it; he said, This means weighing: I have to go upon the scales; the weighing time has come: “Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.” Sometimes we have to be weighed without our consent being obtained. All life has to be weighed; the plumbline has to be set against every wall, and if the building be bad, as bad as it will be if not built first with the plumbline, down it goes, not arbitrarily, but because the laws of nature, gravitation, will not have crooked lines and bad speculative building and mean jerry-work in its holy universe. There must be a great tumbling-down of bad building. On the other hand, we can lay comfort to ourselves by saying that because there is a plumbline in the

hand of God no good action shall be allowed to fall, no good building shall perish ; nothing that is right shall suffer loss ; the judgment of God is but an aspect of his mercy.

Amos talked thus roughly and frankly, and Amos had a poor congregation. Men do not like this kind of speech. Better talk in polysyllables that jingle to one another, and call rhyme poetry ; better sing some wordless lullaby, for thieves like sleep after felony. Who cares for judgment ? If Amos were to return to the church there is not a congregation in the world that he would not dissolve. Amaziah represents what would happen : “O thou seer”—there is mockery in the tone : thou man of eyes ; seeing, penetrating, piercing looker ; thou cowherd seer—“go, flee thee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there [sell thy judgments in Judah] : but prophesy not again any more at Beth-el : for it is the king’s chapel, and it is the king’s court”—go, talk to the rabble, but do not let the king hear thy raving ! The prophet of God has always been handed down to the poor. There is a refinement that cannot speak above whispers ; there is a delicacy that goes daintily down to hell,—quietly, easily, gracefully ; but you can hear the rustle of the silk as it goes down to be burned. The religious teachers have always been handed over to the canaille, to the rubbish of society. Religion has always been regarded as an excellent thing for the East-end.

Chapter vii. 10-17.

THE TRUE MINISTRY.

AMAZIAH was no true priest. He mimicked the priesthood and made the best he could of it; he was not called or ordained of God. Amaziah, therefore, was a false priest, and whatever he says will have a note of falsity in it. When he says good words they will turn to bad ones upon his lips. No flower retains all its bloom when a bad man culls it; it is ashamed of its ownership.

“Amaziah the priest of Beth-el sent to Jeroboam king of Israel” (ver. 10).

A very familiar policy; the very rudest idea that could occur to the commonest quality of mind. Amaziah has no answer in music; he cannot supply a counterpart to the wondrous talk of Amos; therefore he adopts the policy of describing Amos as a conspirator. How the tone of the prophecy changes at this point! Whilst Amos talks we are in the presence of one who with the thunder talks as friend to friend, who lays his hand familiarly on the ocean's mane, and plays with those hoary locks without sign or throb of fear. When Amaziah comes upon the scene all he can say is, that Amos is at enmity with the king, and is seeking to carry out some political idea fatal to the throne. Accuse the man to the king, was Amaziah's simple but base policy.

Before the days of Amaziah, and since, this policy has been, and has become, well known. Jesus Christ was accused of seeking to overturn the throne of Cæsar—“If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend.” That staggered Pilate. He knew he was the friend of Cæsar—any Cæsar; he pledged his troth and loyalty to the throne, and not to the passing Cæsar only. He was therefore stupefied, bewildered, lost. And the apostles were pursued by the same charge. There was no other

charge that could be understood against them. Their prayers could not be assailed; they were so simple, spiritual, noble, benevolent; they were charged with the spirit of good-will towards men. Their miracles were all miracles of beneficence; their doctrine was so mysterious that the common mind could not argumentatively handle it or reply to it; there was a ghostliness about it which kept men at bay. All that could be said was that if they succeeded Cæsar was no longer king—not that they cared about Cæsar; in their hearts they hated him, but any stone will do to throw at an enemy.

Amaziah continues, "Thus Amos saith." How he belittles the occasion! Amos did not say a word of it. And yet he said every word. But they were not the words of Amos, and Amos disclaimed them. He said, I never created that music; I was as much surprised at the majesty of the music as anybody who heard it could possibly be: I was an instrument. Amaziah, however, personalises the thing and says, Here is a man talking—a fanatical, enthusiastic, ill-regulated man, who has certain things to say, certain babbling that he must utter, and specific declarations that he must speak, and the whole land is tired of his treasonable talk; send word what is to be done with this political heretic. Amaziah was false himself, and therefore he thought it was impossible for any other man to be true. That is the philosophy of all badness. Only goodness can see goodness; only innocence thinks that the dog will not bite; only childlike simplicity can lay its hand on the cockatrice's den, and run out to meet the lion in his rampant fury. It never occurs to the little child's heart that anybody or any beast can propose to do mischief. Contrariwise, the bad man never gives credit to any other man for being good. He says, It looks well enough, but under it all there is a spirit of selfishness and badness. He judges by himself. "Evil be to him who evil thinks." The French language has given us that proverb—about the solidest thing it ever gave the world. The evil man cannot get away from himself. When good is done to him he suspects it; when he gets a letter all love he says, There is a thorn somewhere about this rose. A man who is insincere cannot believe in the sincerity of another man. He says that that man is playing a game; he can

see the trickster in him; he does not hesitate to describe him as a juggler—he knows that the end of it will be bad. How does he come to know all this? Because of the malignity of his own heart—As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he. The false man never met a true one. We see what we ourselves are; we see our reflection in all things, in all life; the noble nature sees nobleness everywhere. The selfish man cannot believe in the benevolence of any other man; he says, This is an investment; this is done for the sake of publicity; this is a tribute to selfish vanity—all this is arranged. The base man cannot talk noble language. The earthly man cannot understand the heavenly. He says, This is fanaticism, this is ill-regulated enthusiasm; here is a man who pretends that he sees spirits, and feels spiritual ministries operating in the heart; here is an individual who looks upon all nature as symbolical, typical, apocalyptic, pointing to something beyond itself; here is a man who sees in time an algebraic sign indicative of eternity; what folly he talks, what folly he perpetrates; instead of standing on the solid earth, and talking about things that can be handled, he moves away above the horizon, and professes to see some other worlds glowing in the unmeasured distance. So earthliness can never understand heavenliness; the lips that are dumb in prayer never can speak a word of appreciation about the man who lives in divine communion. Always get at the character of the critic. Never mind his criticism, pay no attention to it; get at himself, his life, his deepest thought, his highest purpose, and you will find the revelation of all his judgments; be they ill-natured or magnanimous, they are but a portraiture of himself.

“Amaziah said unto Amos . . . Go, flee thee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there: but prophesy not again any more at Beth-el” (vers. 12, 13).

Why? “For it is the king’s chapel”: literally, it is the king’s sanctuary. What is the mistake in that statement? The whole statement is a mistake. The high priest at Jerusalem never called the temple the chapel of the king, except he meant by the term king the eternal Majesty of heaven. It was God’s temple, the Lord’s house, Zion elect and consecrated, and made the home of the people of his choice. This is a fine conception of a

State Church—"It is the king's chapel." The whole secret is there of a mistaken conception of the Church of God, or the Church of Christ. The king has no chapel, except in the sense of a worshipper, a contrite broken-hearted man, who has left his crown anywhere that would hold it until he went in to say his prayer, and call upon God for mercy. "It is the king's chapel," quoth Amaziah : in other words, and more modern, It is private property ; you must not prophesy here ; this chapel was built by private money for private purposes, and beyond those purposes it must not be used. So, in modern times, saith the trust-deed, duly enrolled in the High Court of Chancery. This is exactly what is being said to-day. We have to-day what we term denominational property. That is a peculiar expression. The stones are denominational stones ; the bricks are Methodistical bricks ; the beams are Congregational wood ; the roof is Episcopalian slating. We have denominational property ; you must not speak here, because you do not belong to us ; if you speak here it is by tolerance, by courtesy, by momentary concession, as who should say, Friendliness seems to compel us to allow you to say what may occur to you ; *noblesse oblige* ; you can deliver your soul, but the moment you have done we take up the broom and sweep out your footprints : it is the king's chapel. There is no such house of God. The house of God belongs to every true man. The house of God is consecrated to all truth. If any man were to rise and say, Two and two are five, it is the Church that should correct him. All truth nests under the roof of the sanctuary ; all poetry sings within the walls of the Christian temple ; all beauty has a right to hang its pictures on the walls of God's house. Never drive music and poetry and beauty away to build secular walls and secular roofs, but welcome them ; there is always room if you choose to find it in the Church of God for every lovely song, for every beauteous picture, for every noble exposition of known or unknown truth. The Lord built a sanctuary for Israel—not of Israel. We must take great care how we talk about our Church, our property, and our trust-deed, and our denomination, and our theology. It would be a blessed flood of rain, straight down out of heaven, that sunk a good many of these things so that they never could be found any more.

See the policy of Amaziah, and in his policy see the exact stature of the man. Amos is a conspirator ; the chapel is private property ; if any prophet wants to say anything let him go anywhere else and say it. Has the world got much beyond that ? There was one good thing about Amaziah's statement—he did see that there was a connection between prophecy and the state ; he saw clearly enough that if the principles of Amos took effect, the State could not remain as it was. The State ought always to feel that there is a Church in the middle of it ; and that Church should represent itself as a judgment seat, as the fountain and source of much human benevolence, as a critic that ought to be feared not because of its censoriousness, but because of its righteousness. And the State should be made to feel that every preacher that is in it affects its quality and its destiny. You cannot preach truth in the State without affecting the State sooner or later. Every school that is built carries the State inside it ; every home that is well conducted will affect the imperial policy in due time. All things should be levelled in this direction, so that they shall not terminate in themselves or in the formation of common sentiments which are to be quoted as parts of rhetoric or copied as specimens of writing ; they should be looked upon as ministries, forces, agencies, remoulding, renewing, readjusting all things, with a view to the incoming of the eternal morning called heaven.

It will be well now to hear Amos—a fine rugged voice that was at home in the open air ; that noble tone that melted into the high wind as if by right of kinship :—

“Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah, I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son” (ver. 14).

Read it emphatically : No prophet I, no prophet's son I. The emphasis is intense. “. . . But I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit.” Amos always kept good hold of his history. Because we let our personal history slip from the memory we lose a great deal of power. Remember your poverty ; remember early hardships ; remember through what difficulty you had to fight for every inch of foothold you have secured ; remember how you were sustained in weakness ; recall the time when men were so savage against you that you were not certain

whether you would end your days in the workhouse or in the madhouse ; recall your history, have it as a daily companion, because keeping fellowship with your memories you can take the next step with the greater ease and grace, and it shall be by the goodness of God a step upward and a step heavenward.

“And the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel” (ver. 15).

“The Lord took me” : I was passive, I was never expecting such election and elevation—an elevation that brought danger ; an election that was charged with solemn responsibility. It is the Lord’s doing ; if I am a prophet at all it is because the Lord hath anointed me. How he lifts the subject to a new level ! With Amaziah he is a conspirator, a man arranging a policy of selfishness, talking mysteries that he may bewilder the people. When Amos stands upon the scene he changes the whole perspective, he elevates the entire level ; he says, If I am anything at all, I am God’s chosen servant ; I have only spoken what I was told, I have simply delivered a message ; I never sat down in my life to write a sentence, saying, This is shapely, this is classical ; the people of Israel will consider this a very polished composition ; I never made a sentence in my life. When I opened my mouth the Lord’s thunder escaped my lips, and I heard it with surprise, and knew it was the tempest of judgment. How his face burns ; how his port dignifies ; how he conquers a space for himself ; and how the caitiff Amaziah, the mimicking priest, falls back into his proper shadow. You know the true man when you see him. If people will listen with their hearts they can easily tell which is the true voice and which is the false voice.

Jesus Christ submits himself to this test ; he is willing to be tested in the stress and agony of life. “No prophet I,” only an instrument. Have I uttered music ? The Lord discoursed it upon me himself. Have I said anything revolutionary ? It came from him around whom the lightnings gather, saying always, Here we are : if I have declared any great principle it was given me to declare. This is what the Apostle Paul says : “I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you” I

am not a gospel-maker, I am a gospel preacher; I have taken the gospel as I find it, and according to my ability and opportunity I have made it known.

This is the true ministry. Ministers are not self-made. Be very careful how you get up and say the Lord has made you a minister. Let this coming into the ministry be a matter of irresistible pressure; a question of real pain, bringing with it a consciousness of a certain degree of momentary loss, peril, a deep sense of insufficiency, and let your life express great and solemn and reverent conviction. The Lord will find his own ministers. All we have to do is to say, Lord, thrust out labourers into thy harvest. Any men we thrust out are wrong men—they are nice, very nice; some of them very nice-looking, and so quiet, and in-offensive, and childlike, and sweet, they would not make a noise in a parlour; they would never annoy any prejudice. There never was a hoary old prejudice in the human mind that could not slumber because it knew they were not talking at it, but only talking about it; so it could keep on napping and slumbering even in the Church—that famous dormitory. The Lord will find his ministers. Some of them will be rough; rams' horns will be the only instruments they have, and they will, thanks be unto God, be destitute of theological training; but how they will talk when they come; how they will chop their way through social jungles; how they will burn and denounce on the one hand, and how tender and gentle and shepherdlike they will be on the other! Meeting proud self-righteousness, they will go mad with holy indignation; meeting the outcast and the lonely and the weary and the lost, they will say, Go, and sin no more; or they will say, Arise, the Master hath come, and calleth for thee; or they will say, Return, O wanderer, to thy home, thy Saviour calls for thee. They will not be men who have certain little patent keys which alone can open certain little patent drawers in which eternal enigmas are hidden, and which can only be read by men who have passed through a certain training. God has kept nothing for scholars. There is nothing worth knowing that requires scholarship to know in the kingdom of God. Scholarship has the smallest theatre in which to operate. It is great in mines, in electricity, in biology; great in zoology, great in many

ologies; but there is nothing in God's Cross that needs scholarship. Otherwise salvation would be of works; salvation would be a question of intellectual cultivation, capacity, agility; salvation then would depend upon the mind, whereas now it depends upon the broken heart. This is the guaranteed ministry, because it is the true ministry. God will find his men. We are far too meddlesome about this matter of trying to discover men whom we can put forward into a ministry for which they are utterly unfit. Thank God the people are the judges. We may jewel these dear little watches in five holes, but if they will not keep the time, tell the time, people will soon throw them away. Blessed be God for the people!

"Now," said Amos, gathering himself together,—“Now, therefore, hear the word of the Lord.” Contrast this statement with what Amaziah had said in verse 11: “For thus Amos saith.” Amos says, No: I did not say it—“hear thou the word of the Lord.” No man must make his own sermon. No man has any right to make a sermon. He is a trickster in the sanctuary who makes sermons. He must simply stand up and say, Lord, at thy call I am here: now thunder through me, or give me the tears that are more persuasive than tempests; I am thy instrument, discourse upon me as thou wilt.

“Thou” [continueth Amos], “Thou sayest, Prophesy not against Israel, and drop not thy word against the house of Isaac. Therefore thus saith the Lord; Thy wife shall be an harlot in the city, and thy sons and thy daughters shall fall by the sword, and thy land shall be divided by line; and thou shalt die in a polluted land: and Israel shall surely go into captivity forth of his land” (vers. 16, 17).

They were awful men, the old prophets. Would God they lived now!

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou dost watch our life; there is nothing hidden from the eyes of judgment, or from the vision of love: all things are naked and open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do. Thou knowest our neglect, our shortcoming, our trespass; all the innermost thought of our mind thou lookest upon as if it were plainly spoken in the words of men. Enable us to know that the eye of the Lord our God continually searches us, and may we be prepared to meet him, not in judgment, but in penitence and self-accusation. We thank thee for thy Word, for its great boldness, for its mystery of power and majesty, and its still greater mystery of tenderness, pity, sympathy, and redeeming love. Truly thou art wonderful; such is thy name, and such thy revelation. We have heard thee roar from Zion, and we have heard thee plead with thy wayward people as if they were little children that could only understand words of love. Speak to us as thou wilt, now in this way, now that; only take not from us thy presence, and the assurance of thine interest in our lives. May we know thee to be near, to be looking on, to be taking continual notice of us; mayhap we may be awakened to higher attention, we may turn upon thee the expectation of our heart, and in some moment, suddenly coming, but to be remembered for ever, we may cry, God, be merciful unto me a sinner! And concerning each of us the angels may say, Behold, he prayeth. Look upon us in all our activities, policies, undertakings; sanctify to us all our bereavements, losses, sorrows; make us solemnly joyous, and joyously solemn, so that whatever the air may bring, vision of light, or frown and cloud of judgment, we may know that God is near, and that the Cross of his Son uplifts itself above all the tumults of time. At that Cross we bow, before that Cross we pray; it is the only way to God, to pardon, to purity, to peace. O blessed Cross, rugged, shameful, ghastly Cross, yet to become a Tree of the Lord's right hand planting, and to gather within its hospitable shade the whole universe of men, hear us when we sing, hear us when we pray, and whilst we are confessing our sins before the Cross, may we know that the Lamb has been lifted up, and that by the grace of our dying, triumphing Saviour we have been pardoned and set at liberty. Amen.

Chapter viii.

"A BASKET OF SUMMER FRUIT."

"Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A basket of summer fruit" (ver. 2).

AMOS continued his visions notwithstanding the rude and mendacious interruption of the false priest Amaziah who sent a lie to Jeroboam. Amos confronted the false priest, as we

have just seen, boldly and destructively. You cannot reply to a thunderstorm. Anything that a man may say after a whirlwind is very feeble. We have heard the great speech of Amos, as it rolled round and round the withering Amaziah like tempest on tempest. Now Amos stands up as if nothing had happened, and in one of his quiet moods he tells us that he had a vision. A sweet familiarity distinguishes the style of the prophet as he approaches this department of his revelation. The Lord is represented as calling him by name, "Amos,—what seest thou?" In the Bible there is a wonderful familiarity of this kind; often there is a species of conversation, friendly interview, domestic talk, as if the Lord had concentrated himself upon the individual in question; as, for example, "When Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and said, Zacchæus." "The Lord said unto Moses, I know thee by name." There is always something tender when our knowledge comes to a knowledge of name, especially when that name stands up as a signal of truth, honour, love, music. When we mention some names our eyes fill with tears, because they are names that have histories in them; they recall times of darkness, desolation, long nights of loneliness, or days of harvest and festival and mutual joy. The Lord spake thus to his servant; and the familiarity never interfered with the revelation. It is the familiarity of love; it is not the familiarity of contempt or disregard or indifference. There is a way of naming a person which means that you are going to whisper some heart-secret into his ear. There is an off-hand naming of men which amounts to nothing; but there is another naming which amounts to baptism, and still fuller sacrament; a masonic sign which means that heart is going to talk to heart. This was in the tone of the Lord as he said, "Amos, what seest thou?" The Lord knows what we see, but he wants us to tell him. We need not pray in the sense of endeavouring to give God information, but he likes to hear our lisping, our broken speech, our poor grammar; he takes an interest in our stumbling and blundering; he will not answer all we say because he knows we would not say it if we really knew what it meant, but he will answer that part of it which is for the soul's health and enrichment and invigoration. "What seest thou?" What wouldst thou? What is thy desire and what is thy petition? and it shall be granted unto thee.

He knows it before we begin to make any statement; yet he likes us to talk. We are educated by speech; we startle ourselves by the sound of our own voices. There are men who could not pray aloud and retain their reverence. There are other men who have the gift of praying audibly, and the gift of understanding what a thousand hearts all want at once, and they exercise that prophetic and intercessory function to the infinite advantage of the world.

Every man has his own vision of God. The vision changes. Amos saw the incoming of the grasshoppers and the wonderful work which they did amid the grass of the land; then he saw the Lord with a plumbline in his hand; and now he sees a basket of summer fruit: and in all this he is a fool to the worldly man. We have just seen that the insincere man never can understand sincerity; the little-minded man never can comprehend magnanimity; the worldly soul can never enter into the mystery of prayer, except by such pedantic criticism as affects to despise, or at least question its rationalism and its utility. Let every man talk in his own way. There is an insanity of wisdom; there is a transcendentalism of feeling which will make its own speech, and thus affright those who live within the speech which has been made for them. It will do us good to hear all kinds of speech, and see all manner of visions; we shall be startled out of our insularity, and be made to feel that there is nothing lonely in God's universe; that the least of the worlds is a nexus, connecting us with the infinite, the boundless, the divine.

"A basket of summer fruit" (ver. 2).

Fruit was the last sign of harvest in Palestine. When the fruit was gathered the harvest was over. What, then, is the meaning of this vision of a basket of summer fruit? The meaning is that Amos saw the end. This is the crop. A basket of summer fruit was no poetry in the estimation of Amos. It was not an ornamental selection of fruits, looking upon which men would say, How lovely, how luscious, how delightful, how appetising! Summer fruit had a mournful suggestion about it in Palestinian lands and times. "What seest thou?"—The end, the gathered harvest, the upmaking of all things, the year in its results: good or bad, there it is, Can this

fruit be changed now? No. Will not the sun work some miracle of ripening upon it? Never more. There is an end of ministry, of service, of stewardship, of life. We are reminded of such end by the end of the day, the end of the month, the close of the year: the harvest is past, the summer ended, and the year waits to tell all its little story of thought and action, purpose and prayer, suffering and triumph. Oh that men were wise, that they understood these things, that they would consider their latter end—the basket of summer fruit, the ingathering of the fields and the vintages. How stands it with us this audit day? How runs the story? Have we been malevolent or benevolent? Shall the year be remembered for its nobleness of purpose and its industry of execution? Or shall it be a year that we would gladly forget? Remember there is a gathering of fruits, a crop time, a day on which men say, The year has been good, or, The year has been bad; the fields have disappointed us, and the trees have blighted our hope; we thought in the springtime that their blossoms would have ended in fruitfulness, and they have ended in nothing but disappointment and loss and aggravation. Or shall it be otherwise? The answer lies in part within the compass and action of our own will. Shall we be a little better? Shall we distinctly indicate an upward tendency, in thought, in aspiration, in desire? It lies within our will to be fools or to be wise men.

"Then said the Lord unto me, The end is come upon my people of Israel; I will not again pass by them any more" (ver. 2).

And yet that is a word which the Lord cannot keep—blessed be his name, infinite eternal praise be to the Cross. The Lord in denouncing these judgments means what ought to be the case, what burning hell should hold those who have trampled under foot every sign of his love and judgment and mercy. Hear him; make a way for his wrath; let us hear the sounding of his judgment: "And the songs of the temple shall be howlings in that day, saith the Lord God." What was begun in songs shall end, literally, in shriekings. That is the meaning of the passage. No one can tell how his song will end. Many men are jovial at a certain period of excitement, but exhilaration ends in stupefaction and everlasting loss. "There is a way which seemeth right

unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." My son, join not the singing party, simply because it is a party of singing people; listen to the words, hear the moral tone, understand the purpose of the songs; write this upon thy heart, That every song that is not sent to heaven ends in a chorus of woe. That is the writing. Nothing else is written in the covenant and in the decree but that declaration. The song shall end in shrieking; they who began the festival with a merry heart shall poison themselves in the course of their very festivity, and their dead bodies shall be taken out, the men who carry them saying, Hush! For this is the literal meaning of the expression "There shall be many dead bodies in every place; they shall cast them forth with silence"—with utterances of Hush! let us get this over as soon as we can. Priest, say no good words over these bodies. O thou man, whose shoulders are clothed with white, get thee away—hush!—silent burials: let these bodies which are mere carcases be thrust into the soil shrouded with quicklime; and, ye priests of the living God, take your prayers home—they are for the bodies of the saints, not for the carcases of the suicide and the polluted and the lost. For a time there seems to be joy in sin. He is not a true reader of the philosophy and practice of life who denies a certain measure of so-called happiness to the libertine. Let us be just to the devil. He has for his followers an early laugh; let us put that down to his credit. There is a chuckle at the first which looks like merriment; set it down, but do not add up the account until all the lines are filled. The question is not what are some individual items, but what is the sum-total of the account; and every song that is not sanctified ends in howling, and every man that drank himself into a bloated condition shall be buried in silence, as with the burial of an ass.

The detail which follows is a chapter illustrative of the political economy and the social condition of the prophet's day:—

"Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy [Literally: that pant after the needy. You have seen a hound panting after his prey; so in the day of the prophet the rich men panted for those who were poor], even to make the poor of the land to fail, saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the Sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit? That we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes; yea, and sell the refuse of the wheat?" (vers. 4-6.)

That was the condition of affairs. There was a religion of the body, but not of the soul. The men acknowledged the limitations of the time ; they said, It is new moon ; we must wait. It is the Sabbath ; we must restrain ourselves ;—but, oh, when will that moon go ? When will the Sabbath vanish that we may again pant after the needy, and swallow up those that have no ephod. These were religious men. Nothing is so corrupt as irreligious religion. Nothing so offends the spirit of the universe by its pestilential odour as an impious piety. Where are the dealers we saw yesterday ? It is new moon. Where are the men who were buying a few days ago ? Hush ! this is the Sabbath, and they are not doing any business to-day. Are they not ? They cannot help it. The bad man has no Sabbath. He has closed his windows, but his heart is still a busy mart and exchange and place of barter. The selfish man cannot have a sanctuary ; the bad man can have no Bible, no Sabbath day, no altar, no minister ; yea, when he is looking his minister in the face he is measuring some poor soul for sale, he is reducing the wages of the hireling, he is regretting that he overpaid some man who toiled in his fields. We cannot keep the Sabbath except in the soul. This is the great and true doctrine of the case. When all the places of commerce are closed, and every principal and clerk has gone home, the place is still open, unless the soul shut it up. Let us give these people credit ; they kept the new moon, and they kept the Sabbath day, but they were calculating that they would make the ephah small. How can we make this measure less ? We must take off something by the rim ; that would save so much on such a number in the course of the year : we must increase the shekel, add a farthing to the price. Ten thousand farthings will amount to something ; fifty times ten thousand farthings will make all the difference in our balance-sheet at the end of the year. When will the new moon be gone ? How goes that waning light ? Has the Sabbath closed yet ? Is it not quite six in the evening ? Can we not now begin ? I pant to devour the poor. And what shall become of "the refuse of the wheat"—the portion that used to go through the sieve, the chaff, the little pieces of worthless wheat that the wind has blown away ? Stop : we can sell that ; it used to be blown away, and anybody that could catch it caught it, but now we can make a profit of that,—I pant for profit. When will

the new moon be gone? Surely we might begin almost directly : the poor are outside—the destruction of the poor man is his poverty ; a pair of shoes will buy him, and he may be sold for silver. To this pass have things come.

What wonder that Amos lived just then? The times make the men. The times made Amos—as they made Elijah, as they made Cromwell, as they made Luther. The action of the times develops the quality of men. Amos roared throughout the land. It was indeed but a roaring to those who heard only the sound ; it was music in heaven, because it carried with it the breath and the tone and the justice of truest judgment. The Lord has always raised up friends for the poor, and for downtrodden righteousness and virtue. How have such men been treated? As conspirators—“Amaziah the priest of Beth-el sent to Jeroboam the king of Israel, saying, Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel.” How have such men been treated? As fanatics : they have been beside themselves ; they have been imprisoned ; they have been befouled by every means ; they have been called vulgar, sensational, democratic, unreasonable, and undesirable : yea, stronger names have been applied to them, and epithets which cannot be pronounced in public service. Let such men know the testimony of history, and abide by the fate and the fortune which have marked the evolution of character and the development of destiny. If you will not accept ill names and opprobrious epithets, you are not of the true quality of the sons of God ; if you say, Let us be quiet, let us make no excitement, let us whisper our way into a nameless grave, then the Spirit of Christ is not in you ; your piety is a lie, your prayers are offences to the heaven which they never reach.

How will the Lord speak about this political economy and this oppression and suffering of the poor?

“The Lord hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob [which is by himself, for he has already declared himself to be the excellency of Jacob], Surely I will never forget any of their works. Shall not the land tremble for this, and every one mourn that dwelleth therein? and it shall rise up wholly as a flood ; and it shall be cast out and drowned, as by the flood of Egypt. And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord God, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day ;

And I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation ; and I will bring up sackcloth upon all loins, and baldness upon every head ; and I will make it as the mourning of an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day " (vers. 7-10).

Amend that judgment if you can. Say what wants it in dignity. The very utterance of such a voice is a sign of hope for the land. Judge not by the momentary festival and triumph of the wicked :—the triumphing of the wicked is short, the candle of the hypocrite shall be blown out. Nothing lasts but truth and love and beneficence. This is the divine view of evil-doing. The whole land shall tremble, the light of the festival shall be put out, and men shall be choked by the luxury that is in their mouths, and they who have tuned their voices for song shall find they have prepared their voices for lamentation. Blessed be God for his judgments ; thanks be to God for his thunder and his lightning ! We need the tempest of his wrath to disinfect the social air, and make men think that they themselves are not divine. Nor does the judgment end here :—

" Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor ■ thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord : and they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it " (vers. 11, 12).

They shall have nothing to eat but what their mouths can devour ; they shall be made to feel what it is to be severed from the supernatural, the spiritual, the divine ; they shall be taught what it is to have nothing but flesh ; they shall be overweighted with their own bodies ; they shall have plenty to eat, and their plentifulness shall be an aggravation of their distress ; the spiritual cut off, the vision departed, the holy man no longer in his place teaching the people the way of the Lord ; men wholly thrown back upon the material, and made to feel what it is to live upon dust. Thus the Lord teaches mankind. They cannot wholly be taught by spiritual monition and moral exhortation ; they must be shut up to eat the dust for a long time till it breaks out all over them, and they feel that plentifulness for the body is the outward and visible sign of famine for the soul. We have too many churches now, we have too many privileges and enjoyments ; we have now so many of them that we can find

fault with them and criticise them and pronounce opinions upon them. The hungry man pronounces no opinion upon the bread, but that it is good. It is the epicure that finds fault with his supplies; if he could be hungry for a time he would be a thankful man. The time will come when there will be no Church, no altar, no open vision, no spread volume out of which men may read shortly or at length as they please; there shall be only a retired God, a withdrawn vision, a day all cloud, a night all storm.

O God of mercy, take the wings from every little bird that seeks the sun, but do not take from our souls the desires that would fly towards thee! O do thou blight every little flower, and let it no more see the light of day; but do not withdraw thy sunshine from our souls, or they will twice die—they will die the second death. Reverse all the laws of nature, plague the universe, vex and tease the procession of the worlds and the outflowings of all the floods that make the life and spring of creation; but spare them that call on thee—Take not thy Holy Spirit from us. We have despised our pastors, we have mocked them; we have written bitter things about them; we have made profit by our shame; we have laughed at the altar, and called the sanctuary an abandoned vacancy; but now that there is no word from heaven, no message from the skies, no music in the air, O Lord God Almighty, in the pitifulness of thy great mercy help us and save us, we humbly beseech thee!

Where is the Lord God of Elijah? O ye sermon-bibbers and gospel epicures, fed to a pitch of bloated awfulness of character, critics of the sanctuary, men whose heads are so cool because so empty that they can pronounce opinion upon prayer and song and sermon, and like it and not like it—the days come when you shall be taught by famine what you never could be taught by wisdom! My soul, live not until that day, but pray God to release thee, and take thee into the land of heavenly plentifulness before this poor little earth be given over to spiritual famine. Amen, Amen.

Chapter ix.

OMNIPOTENCE AND OMNISCIENCE.

THE prophet gets clearer and brighter as he goes along. Up to this time we have had visions ; now we have the clear, definite, concrete realisation : "I saw the Lord standing upon the altar." We have come past the visions, the outlines, the apocalyptic cloudings, and we are face to face with the living God. This is music, this is progress, this is characteristic of the way of life ; we end, not in vision of a poetic, ideal, shadowy kind, but in vision that means sight, touch ; an immediate yet not overwhelming, a glorious yet not dazzling and blinding, presence. We were assured by his quality and tone that he would not perish in a cloud. It would have been contrary to the frankness of his nature, and out of harmony with the peculiar tone of his voice, if Amos had faded away. He must leave as definitely as he appeared. When he spoke we knew there was a man amongst us. Now that he is about to go away, and we shall see him, in this exposition, no more, he must speak to us in frankness ; he must not leave us in thunder and judgment, he must find for us a gospel. First let him have his own way. He gives us a picture of omnipotence and omniscience unequalled in all poetry. If I say too much for Amos, produce the evidence to the contrary. The poetry of all languages is open to you ; disprove the assertion that Amos's description of the omnipotence and omniscience of God is unparalleled in sublimity.

What saith the Lord in his judgment tone ? He says men cannot flee away from him. There is nothing beyond the sweep of his arm. But men may dig into hell ? The Lord says, I am aware of it, but when they are in hell they shall feel my arresting hand ; hell, define it as you may, is mine. But they may escape into heaven ? True, yet thence will I bring them down. There is not a chamber in all the infinite palace of heaven from which

I am excluded ; I built all the mansions in the house called heaven. But have not mountaineers and adventurers and spoilers found refuge in the caves of Carmel ? Yes, I made the caves of Carmel ; I am the architect and the builder, and I have the key of every cave : men cannot follow into the caves of Carmel, they are so close together, and when the pursuer comes up the hill he cannot tell into which aperture his foe has passed ; they represent a network, a honeycomb, and man can hide from man in the caves of Carmel : but I settled the geometry of that honeycomb, I know every figure, and I can divide Carmel as if it were a cloud, and discover the runner in his deepest secrecy : I will search and take them out from thence. But men may drown themselves ? True, but they shall not die ; in the depth of the sea I will command a serpent, and he shall bite them : the serpent is my servant ; I made his tooth, his fang ; I entrusted him with his treasure of poison. All things are mine. But men may flee into captivity ? True ; and yet I will pick them out one by one, and say, You are the man I want. You cannot mingle yourselves up with other people, and be lost in the crowd. God, who holds in his hand the throng of the stars, cannot be baffled by any little crowd of our making. All things are naked and open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do ; the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth ; they flame and search ; they spare not. Thou God seest me.

That is the lay prophet's description of the omnipotence and omniscience of God. He was no layman who had that vision. No matter where he began, he concluded in glory. No mere herdman ever dreamed that dream. There are some things men cannot do ; some thoughts men cannot think ; some music men can only utter as the organ utters it, because the hand of skill and the soul of genius may be using the instrument for definite purposes. Thus the Bible proves its inspiration. It never made itself. The basket-work may be man-made—no doubt it is—but the fruit within—the treasure—are God's : the casket may have been found somewhere by man, and paid for as an article in merchandise, but the inner jewellery, the flaming stone, the stones that look all lights and tabernacle all glories, these were not man-made, they were only man-gathered, that man might see

some of the miracles of light, and fall down before new revelations of power and hints of possibility. No herdman and gatherer of sycamore fruit could have made that image of the omnipotence and omniscience of God.

But Amos does not rest there ; he still pursues the fascination that is upon him, and still sees God in other aspects and relations : "It is he that buildeth his stories in the heaven" ; literally, It is he that has built the steps of the heavens ; only each riser is millions of miles high, and each step lands the climber on some new world. Or, for stories read "spheres" ; and the immensities, gleaming radiant worlds, how many are there of them ? A thousand ? Ten thousand ? The poor little telescope has raked up more than a hundred thousand, and when the telescope is tired with looking, it says, I have not yet begun to see ; beyond is the real life of the worlds : improve me, rub these lenses, burnish them, enlarge them, throw them away and replace them with others, for I have not yet begun to see the stories in God's palace. A few of the under-stories I have seen, and they are entrancingly and inexpressibly lovely and glorious ; I cannot get inside them, but their windows are ablaze with light ; yet I am sure I have only begun, or hardly begun ; the stories are miles, millions at once, higher and higher. He was a singular herdman who saw that thousands of years ago. He had no telescope ; he had only the natural vision as an outward instrument, but he had a soul that used that vision to advantage. What is the vision worth ? Nothing, except for the merest appearances, the most transient and superficial coming and going of shape and colour and weight and bulk. What can you see upon a green leaf ? Nothing ; and yet there is a population on that green leaf, mayhap, outnumbering the population of the chief metropolis of the world. He was a singular gatherer of sycamore fruit who made all this up in his own mind ; he might have made the whole Bible, he might have made the universe ; there is fire enough in that man to warm a whole heaven. Do not insult us by suggesting that this man made it all out of his own mind, and had no warrant, guarantee, authority, or inspiration. If so, you increase the miracle, you stupefy the understanding of man.

"Behold, the eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from off the face of the earth; saving that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, saith the Lord" (ver. 8).

That is God's voice. Amos could not have said these words in his own person. God must create his own instruments for preaching, for revelation, for exposition, for all manner and quality of teaching; otherwise we misrepresent God. No man has a right to speak in the divine name, unless that right has been given to him by the divine Sovereign. It is impertinence, it is profanity, it is blasphemy, rank and black, for any man to stand up and say, "Thus saith the Lord, and thus will he do," if he be speaking only out of his own consciousness; then is he provoking men, taunting and mocking men; the words he uses are too large for his mouth, and the thoughts that he would express split him like thunderbolts, for they are not his own. That a herdman, a lay prophet, should have stood up and thus represented himself as the vicegerent and minister of God when he was nothing of the kind, adds to the miracle, and does not diminish it.

But will the Lord judge in fury? And will he proceed in his work with the indiscriminateness which makes no difference between old and young, right and wrong, good and bad? Hear this voice in the midst of the judgment storm:—

"I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth" (ver. 9).

We were terrified by the first loud burst of tremendous judgment; we thought it was indiscriminating, that it fell upon the earth in a fury of vengeance, and could make no distinctions between the right hand and the left: and, lo, the whole image is that of a man who is winnowing the corn. Watch him; he puts it all into the sieve; he takes it in his arms, he uses it so, putting it from point to point with his hands, and what falls out is blown away, and what remains is the wheat; and as he conducts this sifting process there breathes a voice through the wind, saying, What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord. Yet not the least grain shall fall upon the earth. This is minuteness, discrimination, careful criticism. Have no fear, therefore,

if you are right ; if you are the very least grain you shall not be lost ; if you are only chaff you cannot be saved ; if you are the rubbish of the universe you shall be blown away. But if there be in you one speck of value, one desire that cannot find words for its agony, one hope in the Cross of the eternal Redeemer of the world, if there be but the turning of an eyelid that the dying eye may catch the eternal Christ, you shall not be lost ; that look shall be a whole lifetime of prayer, that one desire shall be magnified into a prevalent intercession. There is nothing ruthless in the government and judgment of God. Men condemn or praise wholesale, and therefore their condemnation or their praise is often worthless. But here is a Providence that separates, distinguishes, puts into contrast, weighs men, considers what is in them in the matter of proportion, so that the bad shall not outweigh the good, but the good that is in them shall be the beginning of their salvation. Keep thy poor little prayer. Let that go, and all is gone. Keep thy "God be merciful unto me a sinner," and it will save thee ; that will link thee on to the infinite, the eternal purpose, the boundless love. Keep thine "Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name," it shall save thee from hell. Do not give up the little least bit of religion that is in the heart, for God begins with that ; God created that ; it is the pledge and sign of his presence in the soul. Do not give up the tear of penitence, the silent, glistening, dumb tear that no words can express the meaning of ; that tear is a crystal prayer ; that tear is a jewel in the eyes of heaven ; it cannot speak, it is too eloquent for speech, but it means the whole soul ; let it stand in thine eye ; it shall save thee when the lightnings are abroad.

"All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword, which say, The evil shall not overtake nor prevent us" (ver. 10).

On whom is the doom pronounced ? "All the sinners." Not one of the righteous is mentioned there. All the sinners, all the bad people, all the unsound hearts, all the untrue spirits—they shall fall, though they have many a device to which they trust. So it was with the Ten Tribes. They were tribally dispersed, driven about ; they were not individually lost. There is a tribal dispersion ; there is a corporate dissolution ; there is a family break-up. Every member of the family is living, but there is no

family. That is one mystery of Providence. Every soul is there, but has nothing to do with any other soul. The tribes were once one in spirit, though twelve in number, a chosen unit; but the time came when they were separated on account of their sins by thunder and lightning and a great tempest, and every soul was alive, yet every soul was alone. Death is not the worst fate that can befall men. Death may be but transition; death may be but translation; death is only change of position, change of relation, change of sphere, change of service; but to be alive and yet to be dead; to be looking at a man and not to know him; to have all sacred memories dispersed or dissolved or turned into roots of poison and bitterness; to have been in the house, and to have left it so that no roof can cover all the members of the family; to be part of a shattered commonwealth,—that is the destiny of disloyal souls. Do not mistake life as in itself a benediction and a comfort apart from God. There is a living death; there is a mortal life; there is a sensitiveness that only expresses a deeper blindness than itself; there is a consciousness that covers up a bottomless pit of lost memory, lost affection, lost hope, lost immortality.

Now Amos will talk in a language partly his own. The language he uses will be coloured in some degree by his occupation, or by his observation:—

“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt” (ver. 13).

The laws of nature turned upside down! Some people have imagined that the Lord has made a prisoner of himself in his own universe. He has so constructed the universe that he finds that what he has made is in reality a cage out of which he cannot get; he has made laws, and can do nothing with them; he has outbuilt himself, he has gone beyond his own strength, and he is a creature in the presence of his own creatorship. How often in the Bible he comes and tears the whole thing to pieces, and says that he made it, and has a right to do with it what he pleases; and he will put it together again, or partially; or he will gather it so far up, and then he will dissolve the whole thing. And so here we have the plowman overtaking the

reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the seasons all mixed up with one another, and each pursuing the other without interval,—a rush and tumult of action. This is God's way. He really has not made a cage for his deity. Whatever he has done, all things are under his feet. The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice. We are the victims of the seasons and of the winds; we are meteorologically bound. We do not know what will happen the day after to-morrow—whether it will be a fog impenetrable, or a frost that will seal our front door. God can make it summer when he will, and turn summer into winter by one frown. He can make the snow but the background of the most glowing flowers. What a pity it would have been, and what an impossibility, if God had so built the universe that he could not get out of it, or into it, or round about it, or do anything with it—an incredible, preposterous miracle! Our joy is to believe that God knows all his universe; has made it, established its laws; that he administers its economy; that not a bird falleth to the ground without his notice, and that no being can steal one drop of dew without God missing it or going after it. That is the large faith, the tender faith, the Christian faith, the faith in which we stand.

Amos disappears. He came in as a layman, but he has lost his laity in the grandeur, the range, the music of his prophecy. If this is being a layman, would God all the Lord's people were laymen! What a thunder voice he had! How it crashed and roared amid the controversies, oppressions, tyrannies, and wrongdoings of the nations! And yet how gentle he was! He said some of the gentlest things ever uttered by any prophet of the Lord. But herein is the mystery, because only they who can be really angry can be really tender. Only men of tremendous force can be truly patient and really gentle. So when you find true patience or gentleness, you find but another aspect of real force, sensitiveness, and faculty of judgment and destruction. Again I say, the disparity between the prophet and the prophecy is a proof of inspiration. There is nothing in this man's credentials to assure us that we are going to hear something very special and very great. There are some prophets whose prophecy is killed by their personal testimonials. They come with such a sheaf of

recommendation in their hands, that having read a few of the pages we say, This is impossible ; if all this had been true you need not have had this paper ; burn it, and be your own credential. So with this man. He brings no paper, no certificate, no signed assurance, no diploma of the great and mighty and accepted and orthodox, to say that, on the whole, he is a respectable man, and ought to have a cordial hearing somewhere. He comes with nothing but himself, his God, his message, and he projects himself upon his age, and the age soon knows when it is in the grip of a master hand.

Does he end in judgment ? No, God always ends in benediction if he can :—

“ And I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them ; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof ; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God ” (vers. 14, 15).

And the prophet goes ! What an echo, what a vibration ! What a strange, deep, tender peace comes after such a song ! It is even so with the Christian prophet. He has plenty of judgment to denounce. He must look with eyes of fire upon every form of evil ; yet he must find words that are tender, or he must make them tender by his intonation of them, whereby he may express the gospel that God waits to be gracious. But God's purpose about every man is that he shall have vineyard and wheat-field and well-founded city, and that he shall be no more plucked up like an ill-planted tree, and have his roots torn up to the withering sun. Every man professing to be prophet of God or minister of the Cross must end in gentleness. “ Go ye into all the world, and preach the good news to every creature.” This was said after the crucifixion ; this was the supplement to Gethsemane ; this was the outcome of the Cross. God plans no man's destruction. “ As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked. . . . Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways ; for why will ye die ? ” The universe was constructed for music, not for discord.

OBADIAH.

[NOTE.—“We know nothing of him (Obadiah) except what we can gather from the short book which bears his name. The Hebrew tradition adopted by St. Jerome (*In Abd.*), and maintained by Abarbanel and Kimchi, that he is the same person as the Obadiah of Ahab's reign, is as destitute of foundation as another account, also suggested by Abarbanel, which makes him to have been a converted Idumæan, ‘the hatchet,’ according to the Hebrew proverb, ‘returning into the wood out of which it was itself taken’ (Abarb. *In Obad. apud Pfeifferi, Opera*, p. 1092, Ultraj. 1704). The question of his date must depend upon the interpretation of the eleventh verse of his prophecy. He there speaks of the conquest of Jerusalem and the captivity of Jacob. If he is referring to the well-known captivity by Nebuchadnezzar, he must have lived at the time of the Babylonish captivity, and have prophesied subsequently to the year B.C. 588. If, further, his prophecy against Edom found its first fulfilment in the conquest of that country by Nebuchadnezzar in the year B.C. 583, we have its date fixed. It must have been uttered at some time in the five years which intervened between those two dates. Jaeger argues at length for an earlier date. He admits that the eleventh verse refers to a capture of Jerusalem, but maintains that it may apply to its capture by Shishak in the reign of Rehoboam (1 Kings xiv. 25; 2 Chron. xii. 2); by the Philistines and Arabians in the reign of Jehoram (2 Chron. xxi. 16); by Joash in the reign of Amaziah (2 Chron. xxv. 22); or by the Chaldeans in the reign of Jehoiakim and of Jehoiachin (2 Kings xxiv. 2 and 10). The Idumæans might, he argues, have joined the enemies of Judah on any of these occasions, as their inveterate hostility from an early date is proved by several passages of Scripture, *e.g.*, Joel iii. 19; Amos i. 11. He thinks it probable that the occasion referred to by Obadiah is the capture of Jerusalem by the Ephraimites in the reign of Amaziah (2 Chron. xxv. 22). The utmost force of these statements is to prove a possibility. The only argument of any weight for the early date of Obadiah is his position in the list of the books of the minor prophets. Why should he have been inserted between Amos and Jonah if his date is about B.C. 585? Schnurrer seems to answer this question satisfactorily when he says that the prophecy of Obadiah is an amplification of the last five verses of Amos, and was therefore placed next after the book of Amos. Our conclusion is in favour of the later date assigned to him, agreeing herein with that of Pfeiffer, Schnurrer, Rosenmüller, De Wette, Hendewerk, and Maurer.”—SMITH'S *Dictionary of the Bible*.]

THE VISION OF OBADIAH.

A VOICE thundering at midnight is the voice of Obadiah. It was the voice of a stranger. His age, his country, his parents, his cradle, his grave, are all unknown. Yet, his was a prophet's voice,—deep as the boom of thunder, and penetrating as the lightning, it fell upon the fortified hosts of Idumea, and destruction was in every shivering note. He had been standing on some high pinnacle, on which he heard “a rumour from the Lord”; and with the fidelity of incorruptible righteousness he breathed that fiery rumour across the doomed nation,—the sword was bared against Edom, and whoso sought to turn it aside was cleft by the gleaming blade.

The prophecy is short, but terrible in its fulness. It is a single shout, but the cry rends the rocks of Edom; it is one glance of anger, but all lightnings are in that one flash; it is a single blow, but the blow is from the fist of God. Let us surround the prophet, and hear him repeating the syllables which dropped from divine lips on to his own. It is not a text to be marshalled under cumulative heads. Who could pile a thunderstorm into propositions? Who could tamely syllogise on the slopes of a bursting volcano? Who thinks of his square and compasses when the foundations of the earth are quaking? We run into this storm of annihilating anger, and try to catch one view of indignant Omnipotence, that we may know how to approach him in the gentler aspects of Fatherhood.

“We have heard a rumour from the Lord, and an ambassador is sent among the heathen” (ver. 1).

The nations are in the hands of God. From his throne he notes every relationship conceived by human wisdom and sealed by human covenant. We cannot build out God. He can summon other nations, and put this war-cry into their mouth, “Arise ye, and let us go up against her in battle.” In the shoutings of these Biblical battles, we often hear but the echoes of the Eternal voice. God sometimes argued with words of wisdom and persuasive entreaty, and sometimes with sword and spear and bow; but whether in this way or in that, the sublime truth written on

the fronts of history is,—that underlying everything there is a divine hand, and far above everything is an unslumbering eye. God is the only true defence of nations. If he has set his purpose on our ruin, he can put force enough into the spoiler's muscle to crumple up our navy, and show the spoiler how to melt our piled iron that it may be poured out like water! To some it will sound like a fool's philosophy when we declare that altars are the mightiest bulwarks, righteousness is the invincible panoply, and reverence the holy atmosphere which cannot be rent by the shouts of war. Do not sneer at the idea. When you have put it to the test, and found it fallacious, then reduce it to ashes by the flames of mockery.

"Behold, I have made thee small among the heathen: thou art greatly despised" (ver. 2).

God himself describes all the circles into which creation is divided. We have our own compasses, but their lines are written on the sand, and the hissing wave dances upon them in scorn, and behold they cannot be found! Who was it that determined that the daisy should for ever look up at the oak, without being able to advance one cubit towards its proud height? Who was it that bade the lark come so high, and the eagle so much higher towards the domes of light? Who established the unalterable proportions and wrote the unchanging laws of nature? Who made one star differ from another star in glory? It is he who also makes one nation small and another great; who makes Edom little among the heathen, and turns on Idumea the scorn of its best allies. Compared with the regal magnificence, the dazzling pomp, the ocean-like force of Assyria, and Egypt, and Chaldea, the Idumeans were small and contemptible; and while they were attempting to account for their position on second causes, God answered their enigma by saying, "I have made thee small among the heathen." Profound and precious is the lesson conveyed by such an utterance. The meaning of it is intended for every man. He is a madman who makes his calculations without God. There is a sense, and a far-reaching one, in which every pauper's rags and every prince's purple are the gifts of God. We should save ourselves many a groan if we pondered this arrangement more.

"The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee, thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; that saith in his heart, Who shall bring me down to the ground? Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the Lord" (vers. 3, 4).

Here is God hissing scornfully at the false securities of the race. All the southern part of Palestine was full of caverns hewn out of the rocks, and the people hastened for safety to these subterraneous dwellings. As protection against human power, those fastnesses might be considered impenetrable; but as defences against an avenging heaven, what were they but as a trembling coverlet of withered leaves! The Idumeans hastened also to the lofty crags, on which, as on unhewn thrones of granite, the proud eagles paused in their flight towards the sun, and sitting on those giddy heights, they sent forth the challenging cry, "Who shall bring us down to the ground?" Poor insects, on a giant's palm; they knew not that he had but to close that palm, and they would be crushed for ever! "Though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the Lord." In the light of this declaration let us examine our covenants! Let each man look to his own standing-place,—let us try our securities as by fire! Fool beyond all fools is he who thinks to clothe himself with iron which the bolts of heaven cannot penetrate. Hear the word of the Lord, ye who dwell in caves of your own digging: "There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord." "Knowest thou not this of old, since man was placed upon earth, that the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment? Though his excellency mount up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds; . . . he shall fly away as a dream, and shall not be found: yea, he shall be chased away as a vision of the night." "Though they dig into hell, thence shall mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down: and though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence; and though they be hid from my sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command the serpent, and he shall bite them: and though they go into captivity before their enemies, thence will I command the sword, and it shall slay them: and I will set mine eyes upon them for evil, and not for

good." These are shoutings which make the universe turn pale ; the knees of mailed armies smite each other when the Lord dareth them to battle !

"If thieves came to thee, if robbers by night, (how art thou cut off!) would they not have stolen till they had enough? if the grapegatherers came to thee, would they not leave some grapes? How are the things of Esau searched out! how are his hidden things sought up!" (vers. 5, 6).

These verses show that God works utter destruction: the thief does not take every article of property away,—the grape-gleaners leave here and there a bunch behind them; but God, by the Chaldeans, sought out the hidden things,—sundered every tie,—blighted every flower,—extinguished every light,—and enthroned Death as the King of the wide desolation. No gleaner need enter a field which God's own sickle has reaped !

"All the men of thy confederacy have brought thee even to the border: the men that were at peace with thee have deceived thee, and prevailed against thee; they that eat thy bread have laid a wound under thee: there is none understanding in him" (ver. 7.)

The Idumeans and the Chaldeans were firmly attached; they constituted a powerful confederacy,—they had leagues and covenants; but God turned the Chaldeans against their allies, and the very men who had their bread turned the sword against the Idumeans. Thus wonderfully can God interpose among the organisations, relationships, and policies of nations.

"Shall I not in that day, saith the Lord, even destroy the wise men out of Edom, and understanding out of the mount of Esau?" (ver. 8).

The Edomites were famed for sagacity, prudence, and general mental skill, but God here comes forth as the Monarch of Mind, and says he will destroy their wisdom and understanding. He not only melts the iron-clad fortress, or shivers the rock, or flings open the gates of the sea, or rifles the depths of hell, but he touches the brain, he shakes the throne of reason, he puts out the eyes of understanding. The high priests of wisdom come together to take counsel against the Lord, and the Lord blows upon their brain, and their counsels are confounded; the Lord touches their tongue, and they babble the jargon of insanity. "He disappointeth the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot perform their enterprise. He taketh the wise in their

own craftiness : and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong."

In the subsequent portion of this vision God reproves Edom for the wrong done to Jacob, and proclaims the eternal law of righteous retribution. The prophet then dwells upon the restoration of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity, and proclaims their final prevalence over all their enemies, concluding with the triumphant assurance, "And the kingdom shall be the Lord's."

Looking at this vision as affording a glimpse of divine purpose in relation to humanity, we may take our stand on two distinct facts :—

(1) Divine superintendence of human history. He is a shallow historian who records only the undulations of the social, political, and ecclesiastical surface. As a student of the universe, I wish to know not only the stupendous, palpable existences,—sun, moon, stars, seas, mountains,—but I wish to know their birth-forces. I would see them, as it were, while as yet they are but creative syllables rolling from the lips of Omnipotence ; nay more, if possible I would see them while they slumber as purposes in the Infinite heart. He who takes me to the earliest germ of national life, is to me the true historian ; but he who finds that earliest germ in anything short of divine volition is unfit to guide me through the black ravines, or the temple corridors, or the mountain grandeurs of a world's entrancing story. In all Bible history we find God upon the circle. There is no page dedicated to atheism. God is always there, in shining person, or guiding eye, or directing voice, or celestial effluence ; this book is, so far as one world is concerned, the very biography of God ! Aye, God himself is the central character, and as he sweeps in majesty across our tiny globe, age by age, we see kings and thrones, and empires and nations attached to his flaming chariot. This sublimest of all historical books is not a mere registry of facts or dates ; it is not a mere accumulation of meteorological tables, showing the variations of political or moral climate, or representing the tide-marks of national advancement or recession—it is a chronicle of the one heart of God, and the one heart of humanity ; it is the blended story of the heavens and the earth.

We have (2) divine sanctification of human history. This vision of Obadiah is summed up in words which might well form the concluding sentence of the history of the whole world ; these words are : "And the kingdom shall be the Lord's." As we look at this as the ultimate object of the divine government, we see that a great sanctifying process is in reality continually operating in human history. God is working in the midst of the moral gloom, and he will work until the last shadow has for ever departed : "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord : and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee. For the kingdom is the Lord's : and he is the governor among the nations." "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed : and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever." "And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him." "And the Lord shall be king over all the earth : in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one." All these voices confirm the doctrine that a sanctifying process is underlying all human history. We see but a scattered and struggling light ; we hear but a voice here and there ; we wonder how the heavens can become flooded with splendour, and how the air can be filled with one glad and undying song ; and we should despair could we not lay our trembling hand on the recorded oath of Omnipotence, and see in the van the "dyed garments," and hear at midnight the war-shout of Immanuel.

This leads us to the inspiring truth that all our hopes are founded in Jesus, and all our energies sustained by the mighty power of the Holy Spirit. When "the kingdom shall be the Lord's" every man will have found in Jesus Christ his only Saviour, and received into his alien heart the spirit of adoption. God the Father is working for the Son ; God the Holy Spirit is working for the Son—all the orders of celestial being are working for the Son—in all things he shall have the pre-eminence—the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our

God and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever—even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly! Blessed day, when Jesus shall have every heart; when the commingling nations shall have one hymn, one tune, one voice; when every man shall be a saint, and every saint an infant angel nestling in the breast of Jesus! To-day, the great transformation may begin; to-day, the poorest may have fine gold; to-day, the captive may throw off his chains and spring into eternal liberty!

PRAYER.

THIS is the confidence that we have in thee, thou Lord of all, that if we ask anything of thee in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, thou wilt do it for us. We have not because we ask not, or because we ask amiss. We are straitened in ourselves, we are not straitened in God; the river of God is full of water. Thou givest grace upon grace, until there is no more room to receive thy blessing; our vessels are too full, the fountains of heaven cannot be exhausted. Grant unto us, then, what is good for us, that we may in the end be pure, wise, true, useful; may we answer the purpose of our creation, which is to do good, and to follow God in all his ways. We have now learned how foolish we are; we are ashamed to go back upon our own record to read it, because the fire of shame burns in our face. We have done the things we ought not to have done, we have left undone the things that we ought to have done; the record is not good, it is bad: but where sin abounds grace doth much more abound; thy love delights to pity, to help, to forgive, and sanctify. That love is made known to us in the Cross as it is revealed nowhere else; there we see it in all its agony and glory and pity and majesty. God is love: may love dwell in our hearts that we may interpret God; only love can know thee, thou God of love. Do thou therefore increase our love, and perfect it, that it may be sincere, without blemish, beautiful in simplicity, unselfish in all its obedience. We bless thee for thy sweet word; we thank thee for a word that is a light and a honeycomb, a word that exhausts all figures that express necessity and need and fulness and adaptation. Oh that the word of Christ might dwell in us richly all the days! then our days shall be beautiful as revelations, fruitful as harvest-fields, and all our time shall be a preparation for the solemn eternity. Help us in Christ Jesus the Lord to do better in the future than we have done in the past; may we renounce ourselves, may we inquire diligently for God and for his will, and with our whole soul may we obey the will of our Father in heaven. Amen.

J O N A H.

(B.C. 840-784.)

[NOTE.—“ All the information which we possess concerning the prophet Jonah, besides what we learn from the present book, is gathered from the notice of him found in 2 Kings xiv. 25: ‘ He (Jeroboam) restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which he spake by the hand of his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, which was of Gath-hepher.’ Gath-hepher, in Josh. xix. 13, ‘ Gittah-hepher,’ lay in the district assigned to Zebulun. This notice therefore shows that Jonah was a prophet of the Northern kingdom and ‘ arose out of Galilee ’ (see John vii. 52).”—*The Speaker’s Commentary*.]

Chapter i.

THE FLIGHT OF JONAH.

“ Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the son of Amittai ” (ver. 1).

WE are apt to think that this coming of the word of the Lord to men in ancient time was so special a circumstance that it has no application to ourselves. We think of the prophet as a solitary being; we have no doubt that Almighty God did speak to him in some special and peculiar manner; but how rarely it occurs to us that he who spoke to the prophets in times past is now speaking unto us as directly and vividly by the ministry of the Holy Ghost. The Lord comes to us as distinctly as ever he came to the old prophets. How are we to understand that the word of the Lord has come to us? Have we a strong conviction of duty? That is the word of the Lord to our hearts, as distinctly and certainly as if God had opened a door in heaven and spoken to us face to face. Knowest thou what is right? Do it as the word of the Lord. Is your life entirely a life without strong and definite convictions? Then, truly, there is something wrong at the very roots of your being. We ought to have clear persuasions of duty, and in so far as we

have them we are in direct communication with the spirit of the universe. What more can we desire than to be persuaded that the thing is right? The question ought not, with sober, earnest men, to be: Is this thing expedient? Are circumstances favourable to the execution of this purpose? The one sovereign question is, with every man whose life is set in the right key, "Is this right?" Yes. Then it is a revelation from God; it is the testimony of the Holy Ghost in the heart; and, at all risks, it must be done.

"Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me" (ver. 2).

This same event comes to every man. Do not suppose that Jonah is a lonely creature afar off in the ages somewhere, having an experience unique and incommunicable. The experience of Jonah is the experience of every good man. What is your call in life? To go wherever wickedness is and cry against it. Nineveh has perished, but Ninevite iniquity is upon our own streets, is throwing its shadow upon our own thresholds, is sending a keen wail of pain and blasphemy through the very air that blows around us! Every child of God is to be a protesting prophet. Every earnest man is to have no difficulty in finding the word of condemnation when he comes into the presence of sin. If we could realise this call all the Lord's people would be prophets. Is it not a burden to speak against wickedness? Where is the man that dare do it? It is easy to condemn wickedness generally. The difficulty is to say to the individual sinner: "Thou art the man." Almost anybody can stand up before a thousand people and speak against iniquity in the mass. But he must be a lion from God that dare say to the individual criminal, "I charge you, in the name of the Living One, with doing things that are wrong." Still it is well that we should have men who stand up in the midst of cities, and who let the cities know that there are eyes upon them that see things in moral relationships and aspects and consequences; and woe betide the cities of the earth when the voice of the prophet is no longer heard in them! It is a harsh voice, it is a piercing cry; but believe it and regeneration comes, and restoration and lost peace returns, and things are set right before the face of God.

“But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord” (ver. 3).

Here is a man falling below the great occasions of life. How possible it is to be doing a little peddling work, to be mistaking fuss for energy, and an idle industry for that holy consecration which absorbs every power! A man has great difficulty in recovering himself after a lapse of that kind. There are certain hours in our experience after which all other hours are empty and poor; great critical hours that have the making of manhood in them, the determination of destiny in them; and when they come upon us, if we shrink from them, fall below the occasion, it takes a long, long time to gather one's self up again, and to do anything in life that is really, in the sight of God, worth doing. Do not let us be keeping ourselves in reserve for some stupendous occasion. Let us make every occasion great; let us rise to it, and who can tell what may be done by energy, perseverance, devout reliance upon God, holy, undivided consecration to the dear Cross of God the Son!

“And Jonah found a ship going to Tarshish.” Circumstances may be in favour of a man, even when he is doing some bad deed. Observe that. Because some people make circumstances into a kind of Bible, and argue that it is impossible, after all, that they can be so very bad, otherwise circumstances would not have conspired as they have done to further their purposes. “Jonah went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish.” As if it were in the very act of putting off; as if it would have gone five minutes before but for a consciousness on the part of the officers that the chief passenger had not yet arrived. It had been waiting there in impatience; people had been wondering why it had not gone out to sea; the man came running down, and as soon as he got on board the vessel went, and he said to himself, “Now I cannot have done far wrong, after all, otherwise this ship would not have been made ready to my hands.” So do we misconstrue circumstances, and so foolishly sometimes do we talk about the things which are round about us in life! When a man wants to patch a quilt, in order that he may cover and conceal his iniquity, it is not difficult for him to find the pieces to patch, and the needle and thread with which to put them

together. It is difficult sometimes to read circumstances. We do not wonder that the contemporaries of Jesus Christ found it difficult to understand the signs of the times, and very much easier to read the signs of the sky. We are making precisely the same blunders to-day. We set up a foregone conclusion in the mind; we say, "We will do so and so." And having made up our mind to pursue that course, everything round about us takes hue and attitude from the determination of our own mind, and thus we come to have a kind of sovereignty in the region of detail, so that we can turn things pretty much as we please, and then say, "Now, look there." When a man has got wrong at the centre, it is no wonder that he sets up a kind of supernatural wisdom of his own in the inferior region, that he may justify himself to himself; for, unless he be upon good terms with himself, if he consent to his own judgment, there is schism in his life, and no storm you can create outside him makes such a tumult in his soul as his own dissidence from his own soul. Wonderful, therefore, is life; perplexing are the hedgings and surroundings and groupings of life. It is very easy for a man to put circumstances before his own mind in such a light as to mislead him, to gratify his vanity, and to actually constitute a kind of pedestal on which he may stand, that he may the more readily blaspheme his God.

And Jonah paid his fare. How particular some of us are about these little pedantries of morality! We think, when we have defied the Almighty, and run away from his presence, we can go up to the counter like honest men and put down the fare. Many of us are making up by pedantries what we are wanting in the principles of our life. We have good points without having a good soul; we have beautiful characteristics, without having a solid and undoubted character. Jonah has paid his fare? Yes, but he has forsaken God! Can a man like that do anything right? No. You cannot have any rights if you have cut the bond that unites you with the throne of God, with the law of right. When men come to understand these things we shall have less pedantry in our feelings, and we shall not look at one another through the medium of little things and details and petty momentary associations. The question will be, "Art thou right

with God?" Yes! Then you cannot be wrong with man. A man can do nothing right if he is wrong with God. What he does that is so-called right, is right relatively only, secondarily only; it has but a limited sphere; it is not set down to the sum total of the worth of his character.

"But the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken" (ver. 4).

From the beginning the sea has been the pavement of God, over which he has walked as if on a basement of solid gold. What agents he has! He said to the wind, "Catch them!" They were miles away. No matter. When the wind gets hold of a ship it is very difficult to unloose its fists. Oh, it does get hold! It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God! The sea is his, for he made it. Before chart of man was ever written, he made a chart for himself. You cannot escape God. All things do his will. Storm, fire, vapour, frost and morsels of ice, bitter winds, lightning in the air, trouble in the winds, earthquakes, sea storms,—they are all servants in his household, and he appoints each its own work. You cannot get away from God. Whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I go up into heaven, it is the very centre of thy dwelling; and if I make my bed in hell thy shadow is over me, to say that my hiding-place has been discovered.

"Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them" (ver. 5).

The bad man never suffers alone. Here is a man causing a loss of property. He paid his fare! Oh, it was poorly earned money! His fare was taken out again. They cast the wares into the sea; they said, "She is too heavy; she must be disburdened; we must throw away whatever we have—away it all must go!" The bad man cannot suffer alone; the bad man is the tormentor of society; wickedness is the cause of social loss. It is madness for any man to rise up and say, "In doing an evil deed, I am injuring no one but myself. You are injuring everybody. You are causing loss to the universe itself. Yet all the while it appears that Jonah was asleep. There is an innocence that is too innocent. There are some signs of blamelessness which are rather too significant. There is an innocence that

excites suspicion ; there is a harmlessness that is so very harmless that it brings upon itself keen and just criticism.

"Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship ; and he lay, and was fast asleep " (ver. 5).

So wickedness may have some alleviation. A man may have such control over himself that he may actually be able to take some of the blessings that do not belong to him. If he commit theft in heaven, what if he commit some lower theft elsewhere ? It is no consequence. The second criminality is lost in the stupendous act of felony which he first committed. What a tumult there was ! Every man cried out unto his god. So the ship's master came to Jonah and said, "What meanest thou, oh sleeper ? Arise, call upon thy God." What a crying out for gods there is in the time of trouble ! How self-controlled we are when there is no sorrow at our hearts, and how instinctively a man cries out after the invisible, the divine, the supernatural, when he is in any great agony !

The men knew that Jonah had fled from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them so. All the while they had been looking in the wrong direction for an explanation. That is precisely the mistake we are all making. When anything goes wrong, we say, "The ship must be too heavily laden with goods" ; and set to work, tear out all the baggage and throw it into the sea. But the life is leaking out of the heart. What is wrong with you is your heart. This was found out, at last, in the case of Jonah. So they took up the vagabond prophet and cast him into the sea, and the sea ceased from her raging ; with a shudder and a sigh she shrugged back and said, "That will do !" Not till then. Nothing is settled until it is settled right. Understand that in all the relationships of life. You may cobble up a thing, but it is not settled. We are not settled in our character, in the sight of God, until we are settled on the basis of righteousness as it is found in Christ Jesus, the Man of the Cross, the Saviour of the world ! The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin. No man can be right till he is right with God ; and being right with God, everything else will fall into its place,—the sea will be at peace, and there will be no storm in his heart.

MICAH.

[NOTE.—“Micah calls himself a Morasthite, and was a native of Morasthi, near Gath, or (if the two places be the same) Mareshah, a place of some importance in the south of Judah (i. 1, 15). He seems to have been commissioned not long after Hosea, Amos, and Isaiah had begun their ministry, and reiterates the reproofs and warnings which they had addressed to both Israel and Judah. Greek writers (Epiphanius and others) say he was slain by Jehoram, son of Ahab; but they confound him with Micaiah, the son of Imlah (1 King xxii. 8-28); Micah, moreover, does not appear to have suffered martyrdom, but died in peace in the days of Hezekiah (Jer. xxvi. 18, 19). One of his predictions saved the life of Jeremiah, who would have been put to death for foretelling the destruction of the temple, had it not appeared that Micah had foretold the same thing above a hundred years before. He, himself, wrote his predictions (iii. 1, 8), and is referred to as a prophet by Jeremiah, and in the New Testament, Matt. ii. 5; John vii. 42. His language seems also quoted by Zephaniah (iii. 19); Ezekiel (xxii. 27); *perhaps* by Isaiah (ii. 2-4; xli. 15), and by our Lord (Matt. x. 35, 36). His predictions may be divided into three sections. He *first* describes the approaching ruin of both kingdoms; particularising several of the towns and villages of Judah in his own neighbourhood (chap. i.). He then rebukes and threatens the princes, prophets, and people, for their prevailing sins; introducing, however, an intimation of mercy (ii. 3). In the *second* section, he proceeds to unfold the future and better destinies of the people; dwelling at length upon the happiness and glory of the church, under the reign of Christ, in a prophecy which presents a beautiful epitome of the latter parts of Isaiah; and then reverting to the nearer deliverance of the Jews, and the destruction of the Assyrian power (iv. 5). The *third* division exhibits the reasonableness, purity, and justice of the Divine requirements, in contrast with the ingratitude, injustice, and superstition of the people, which caused their ruin. From the contemplation of this catastrophe, the prophet turns for encouragement to the unchanging truth and mercy of Jehovah, which he sets before the people as the most powerful inducement to hearty repentance (vi. 7).”—ANGUS'S *Bible Handbook*.]

Micah i., ii.

SIN AND JUDGMENT.

MICAH was a villager. There are advantages in village life which are not to be found under metropolitan circumstances. It was no dishonour to be a villager in Bible times.

We read of One of whom it is said, "He shall be called a Nazarene." Little or nothing is known about Micah, but his prophecy stands out boldly, written in letters of fire, and surrounded by a very lurid and suggestive atmosphere. There is a great deal of gospel in Micah. How is it that flowers always look the lovelier because they are in unexpected places? When we go into a garden and find flowers we express no surprise; when we find them growing in rocky and stony and uncultivated places, we exclaim, we are filled with wonder, and sometimes our wonder touches the point of delight. We find the gospel of God in Micah; in Micah we find Bethlehem; in Micah we find the whole requirement of God.

Notice that these prophets seldom, if ever, address the poor, the outcast, and the neglected, as the criminals of society. We have nourished ourselves into the pedantry of supposing that if a man has a bad coat he has of necessity a bad character. The Bible never proceeds along these lines. Micah specifies the objects of his prophecy with great definiteness: "Hear, I pray you, O heads of Jacob, and ye princes of the house of Israel." This is in the tone of Jesus Christ. He did not gather around him the halt, the lame, the blind, the poor, the neglected, the homeless, and say, You are the curse of society; you are the criminal classes. I am not aware that any such incident or observation can be found in the whole narrative of the life of Jesus Christ upon the earth. But Jesus Christ never let the respectability of his age alone; he never gave it one moment's rest. He differs from all modern teachers in that he finds the wickedness of society in its high places. He would almost appear to proceed upon the doctrine that the poor cannot do wickedly as compared with the wickedness that can be done by the rich. What stone can a little child throw as compared with the power of a full-grown man? What wickedness can a little child do as compared with the deep-laid, subtly-elaborated villainy of a man who has had much schooling? It is worth while to dwell upon this point, because it strikes at many a sophism—notably at the sophism which we have often endeavoured to expose that men are made by circumstances; that if men were wealthy they would pray; if men had an abundance they would

be reverent ; if men knew not the pangs of hunger they would be lost in a holy absorption, they would be lost in the praise of God. There can be no greater lie. You have done more evil in the world since you were rich than you ever did when you were poor. When you were poor you sometimes did almost nobly ; since you have become encased in luxury you have thought it fashionable and seasonable to doubt, and almost polite to sneer.

All the judgments of the Bible are pronounced upon the educated classes. Nor does the judgment of God rest upon education only ; it proceeds to cover the whole religiousness of the epoch. It is the religion that is irreligious ; it is the wine of piety that has soured into the vinegar of impiousness. Yet we gather our holy skirts, and speak about " the criminal classes." They are only criminal in the sense in which we condemn them, in the degree in which they have been fools enough to be discovered. Vulgaritv has been their ruin ; they have come into notoriety, not because of their sin, but because of their clumsiness : if they had served the devil with greater craft they might have spoken of others as the criminal classes. If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness ! If education has been hired to do bad work, how much bad work it can do ! If religion has been bribed into subservience to the black banner of the devil, with what loyalty it can serve that captain ! This would give us quite a different estimate of society ; this would destroy the whole respectability of the race. Jesus Christ found the throne occupied by the wrong people, and all the magistracies of his time distributed into wrong hands ; the head of the house and the prince, the judge, the king, the magistrate, the ruler—these were wrong. Never do we find Jesus surrounded by the East-enders of his day, receiving his condemnation because their poverty is the sign of wickedness. Education may have ruined society. Intelligence may be turned into an instrument of mischief. Is education then wrong ? The question itself is frivolous, and ought not to be seriously answered. Is intelligence to be condemned ? The same remark applies to that foolish inquiry. We are speaking of perverted education, misused intelligence ; of education and intelligence without moral enthusiasm, and moral

control, and spiritual purpose, and sanctified motive. Such education can do infinitely more mischief than can be done by blank ignorance. Education knows where the keys are; education knows where the grindstone is on which it can whet its weapons; intelligence means craft, cunning, duplicity, ingenuity in the art of concealment. Wealth can do greater mischief than poverty. This alters the whole complexion of missions and evangelistic agencies and Church arrangements; this reverses the whole picture as seen from the orthodox standpoint. Send your missionaries to the rich! Send your evangelists to pray at the doors of the wealthy, the pampered, the self-indulgent, and the self-damned! Do not make the poor man's poverty a plea for foisting your religion upon him. Lend your tracts to the magistrates, the judges, the princes of the land; they need them.

What, then, of the doctrine that men are made by circumstances? Let this be put down in plain letters, that amongst people who can hardly read and write there are some of the most upright, faithful, honourable souls that ever lived. Let this be said with loudest, most penetrating emphasis, that there are people who have no bank account who would scorn to tell a lie. Has poverty not its own genius, and its own record of heroism, and its own peculiar nobleness? Who shall speak for the dumb, and open his mouth for the afflicted, and plead the cause of those who are thought to be wicked, because they have had no social advantages? Where is there a rich man that is good? Jesus Christ could find none. He said, "How hardly"—that is, with what infinite difficulty—"can a rich man get into the kingdom of heaven." It is not like him, it is not the kind of thing he can appreciate; he has no tables of calculation by which he can add up its value; if he get in at all it will be by infinite squeezing, pressing, straining; he will barely get in because his wealth is an instrument which turns his soul away from the metaphysic which finds in godliness all riches, in high thought and pure honour the very element and alphabet of heaven. Still, let it be said with equal plainness, a man is not good simply because he is poor. There are villains even in poverty. A man is not excellent simply because he has not had a good education. We must be just in the

whole compass of this thought. As a man is not necessarily bad because he is educated and intelligent and quick-minded, and of large and penetrating intellectual sagacity, so a man is not necessarily all that he ought to be simply on the ground that he has no monetary resources.

Ponder for a moment the excellence of the religion that dare talk like this. It asks no favours. It does not want to sit down in the pictured room ; it wants to get its foot on the threshold, and through an open door to deliver its message. You cannot invite such evangelism to dinner—it never dines. It is in haste—it flies, it thunders, it smites in the face those who uplift themselves in a blasphemous supremacy ; it eats its food with gladness, and in the fellowship of the good, but it will have nothing to do with the poisoned wine of bribery. Again we come upon our favourite doctrine that the Bible ought to be the favourite Book of the poor, the neglected, the outcast ; the Bible ought to be the people's friend, the people's charter, the very revelation of man and to man, the revelation of man to himself, as well as a revelation of God to man.

Yet the prophet will not have all this evil and shame unduly proclaimed. He is not so far lost to patriotism and to tribal relations as to wish the evil news to be scattered broadcast, that the enemy may revel in it. So he says, "Declare ye it not at Gath." This has become a proverb—"Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon, lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph." Do not foolishly trumpet forth all the evil that your friends have done. Yet men love to do this. Let a piece of good news be forthcoming, and it will have to make its own way in the world ; it must needs crawl from door to door, and slowly impress itself upon the reluctant ears of those who would gladly turn away from the music of such messages. Let a scandal arise, and the world will know it ere one hour goes its little round. And Christians are errand-bearers in this evil agency. They do it as willingly as the worst men out of hell, only they do it in a different kind of tone ; but they do it with ineffable energy, with sleepless industry, with patient detail. Give them a gospel, and it dies in the recesses of their own minds ; give

them a scandal, and they will not dine until they have told everybody they meet; and they will swallow their feast quickly, that they may get out into the highway to tell that the devil has scored another triumph. Not such was the spirit of this rough villager, yet this sanctified prophet of the Lord. He says, The case is bad; prince and priest and magistrate and ruler have gone wrong, but tell it not in Gath. In the days of Micah Gath was nothing, it had lost its Philistinian primacy; still there was the spirit of the proverb, which means, Tell it not to the enemy, let not the blasphemer hear of this; magnify excellence, but say nothing about defect. A prophet actuated by such a spirit ought to be believed. Prophets have a variety of credentials; here is an indirect tribute to the man's own excellence. He knew all, but would not tell it to all the world. Do you know one evil thing you have never told, never whispered, never hinted at? By that sign judge yourselves. Is your heart a grave in which you bury all bad things; or is it a garden in which you cultivate them? By that sign, and not by your blatant orthodoxy, judge your relation to the Cross of Christ. Such was the scathing criticism of the prophet; such is the judgment of Christ upon his Church and upon his nominal followers. He will not allow men to be round about him who take any delight in evil things or in the publication of evil circumstances; he ignores them, he dispenses with their service, and he thrusts them out into the completest darkness—the only atmosphere they are fit for. Let them tell their evil to the heedless darkness; let them emit their poison where no soul can be hurt by its virus. This would alter the Church altogether; this would take away the Church's occupation. There are men who acquire a reputation for themselves by condemning the vice of other people. We must all start again, or we shall make no progress in this divine life, nor shall we promote the best purpose, the holiest intent, of the divine kingdom. Search thyself; be cruel to thine own soul; torture thyself into a higher grade of goodness. The mere persecutor, the hired blocksman and fireman, may be said to be dead. Blessed be God there remains the age of self-martyrdom, there remains the crown due to him who smites himself in the eyes, and bruises himself, that by taking away his worst life he may truly gain his soul.

In the days of Micah there was a species of evil which is not yet extinct. All the evil was not done in public. The prophet therefore proceeds: "Woe to them that devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds! When the morning is light they practise it, because it is in the power of their hand." The condemnation is upon deliberate evil. The evildoers are here in their beds; they are considering at leisure what can be done next. How can it be best attempted, how can it be elaborated to the greatest effect? They slumber over it; having nourished their brain into a higher degree of energy they revert to the subject: How can this policy be best carried out? This is deliberate sin, rolling it under the tongue as a sweet morsel, reverting to it, recalling it, asking for another vision of it. The soul, what a dungeon! The mind, what an abyss of darkness! Soliloquy, how silent! There is sudden evil, and that must always be carefully distinguished from deliberate wickedness. There are bursts of passion, gusts of vehement will, stress brought to bear without notice upon the citadel of the soul. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye who are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness. Consider yourselves, lest ye also be tempted." Distinguish between those who are carried away with a whirlwind, and those who mount the whirlwind deliberately that they may ride forth in that glowing chariot. Hear the words of the fiery apostle: "On some have compassion." Micah is not dealing with this class of men, but with those who have made their bed the sanctuary of the devil; he is dealing with men who say, We will sleep upon this, we will turn it over; we will see what can be done; we will polish and be prepared against the day of assault; we will shut out the world and count our resources; we will settle the whole thing in the privacy of the chamber, and then when the morning light comes we will spring up as naturally as if nothing had been done by way of preparation, and then we will strike with our whole force.

Deliberate sin shall have deliberate judgment. This follows quickly in chapter ii. 3: "Therefore thus saith the Lord; Behold, against this family do I devise an evil." What, are there two devisers? Read verse 1, "Woe to them that devise iniquity";

verse 3, "Thus saith the Lord . . . do I devise." That is the ghostly aspect of life. There is the tremendous danger. The foolish man locks himself up in the darkness of his own concealment, and lays his plot, and works out with elaborate patience his whole conspiracy against the kingdom of light and honour, truth and beauty; he says, None seeth me; I can do this, and none shall be the wiser for my doing it; I will spring forth in the fulness of my preparation when nobody is aware that I have been laying this train of powder. A man once talked thus: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years: take thine ease, take life quietly, enjoy thyself." And one said to him, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee." That was the uncalculated element; that was the detestable ghostliness that haunts us. Even when we are most rationalistic, when we are inebriated with our own philosophy, a sudden touch makes us white, and a whisper drives the blood thickly upon the heart. A man shall rise in all his self-consciousness of power and capacity and ability to do what he pleases, and the wise man shall say to him, Are you aware that you may drop down dead at any moment, such is the condition of your physical system? This factor the man had not taken into account. Always remember that whilst we are devising God also is devising. "He taketh the wise in their own craftiness." And let this reflection make life completer in its repose: "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper," if so be thy soul be wedded to honour, to duty, to reverence, and to the Cross of Christ. Though men conspire against thee, and have the pit already dug, and have examined it carefully by the concealed candle light, and though they should say, "Now it is in a state of readiness, now let the victim come,"—whilst they are stepping back to make way for the victim they will fall into the pit which they have dug for others. The Lord sitteth in the heavens. He watches all. He brings us into great extremities. He shows us over what a precipice we might have fallen. Then he says, Go home and pray!

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we have waited for thee more than they that wait for the morning—when shall the morning come and the night be passed for ever? When shall we dwell in light, and see no shadow of death? We bless thee that these questions are not left unanswered; thou hast written the reply in our hearts, thou hast set forth the answer before our eyes in thy Holy Book; thou hast promised that death shall be swallowed up of life, and that all things shall praise thee, and that all voices shall be in thy great choir. We rejoice in the anticipation of the time when the ransomed of the Lord shall return unto Zion, and when sorrow and sighing shall flee away. Thou knowest when the earth has had enough of them; thou wilt not send upon the earth one sorrow too many; thou wilt not tear thy handiwork to pieces, for thine is not wanton strength. Thou lovest to uphold and construct and preserve; thou art God the builder of all things, and to this end all thy providence is ordered. Surely thou wilt put an end to evil, thou wilt tear down the house of iniquity; yea, thou wilt plough up its foundations, and it shall be found no more for ever. Thy face is set against all evil; thou canst not tolerate it; it is the abominable thing which thou dost hate: we leave it with thee; thou wilt scorch it and burn it, and finally annihilate it. But to what good ends wilt thou bring all things that are of the nature of virtue; how thou wilt uplift every holy thought; how thou wilt ennoble every generous impulse. Thou wilt not break the bruised reed, thou wilt not quench the smoking flax; wherever there is a little that is good, a little that is of the true quality of fire, thou wilt preserve it, and defend it, and mightily and triumphantly bring it to completeness of expression. The Lord reigneth; the throne of the Most High is upon the circle of the universe, there is nothing that lies beyond the sceptre of the Almighty. We bless thee for this confidence in thy personality and in thy government, in the tenderness and minuteness of thy providence. We know all this, and believe it right heartily, because we have been at the school of the Cross; there we have seen into God's heart, there we see the sorrow that lies at the heart of all things as a root out of which alone true joy and true music can come. The Cross of Christ explains the throne of God; we tarry there, we wait in holy expectation; we have no fear of armed men, or of subtle enemies, or of mighty temptations whilst we are hidden within the sanctuary of the Cross. Mighty Saviour, mighty in thy weakness, thou wilt not suffer the least of thy children to be plucked out of thy hand. O dying Man, dying God, Saviour of the world, showing us the mystery of blood which is the mystery of life, lead us to see that where sin abounds grace doth much more abound; and in the overabounding of grace may we find our confidence, our pardon, our peace, our security. The Lord deliver us from all notions that are at variance

with the purity of his own love; all conceptions that are unworthy of the mystery of sacrifice, and teach us, in all humbleness of mind and self-renunciation, how great is love, how wondrous is the death that is ennobled into sacrifice. Thus and thus, day by day, a little at a time, show us the noonday of thy glory, the full light of which we could not now endure. Amen.

Chapters ii., iii.

DIVINE ACCUSATIONS.

"O thou that art named the house of Jacob, is the spirit of the Lord straitened? are these his doings? do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?" (ii. 7).

THIS is a yearning expostulation. The Lord is disappointed; his heart is heavy and sore; the prophecy is not according to his own spirit and purpose, and all things are enfeebled, and he himself is humiliated in the presence of the people and of the nations. We should bethink ourselves that it is God we are representing. When the Church is doing nothing God is misrepresented. It is not the Church that takes and terminates all the origin and effect of this miserable failure; the matter does not rest within the four corners of the Church. The Church has undertaken to represent the supernatural, the eternal, the infinite, the very throne and majesty of God; by right therefore of that assumption God has a right to inquire into the spirit and the action of his Church. We have seen how in the ancient time one man said the sanctuary was the king's chapel. The false prophet made the temple of God into private property; he said, "It is the king's chapel," you have no business with it, you ought not to criticise it; you have nothing to do with it, it is private property. And man, in his best moods, with all his purest, noblest instincts, says, No: the temple of God is never private property, the truth of God is never an individual possession; the kingdom of God is God's kingdom, and what is God's kingdom is meant to be the house and the home, the refuge and the sanctuary of the world. So the Lord takes up our reports, and says, You are misrepresenting me; whenever you are reluctant, indifferent, inefficient, self-indulgent, the matter does not begin and end with yourselves. Are these my doings? A thought of this kind gives a new aspect to all Christian endeavour, prayer, enterprise, and sacrifice. The men who are leading the Church have a right to expect great things. The great things are not in the programme

of all men ; they are content to begin, continue, and close with some measure of propriety ; they have lost the thunder because they have lost the lightning. Our business now is to get quietly done, and to assure ourselves that we can get quietly home. The roar of strength, the flash of glory, the curse of righteous denunciation, the fury of a divine enthusiasm, we have labelled sensational, and put away. Let a man examine his ministry by this test, and he will soon conclude his criticism ; his face will burn with shame because his soul will be filled with a multitude of reproaches.

The Lord proceeds to inquire : " Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly ? " You are trying to do the right thing in the wrong way ; you are wasting the bread of the kingdom of heaven ; you have mistaken the right beginning and the right continuance of all this ministry of revelation. My sun will never do good to a dead creed ; every beam of that sun is a sword striking at that poor outcast dead thing. " Do not my words do good ? "—to whom ? To the man who wants them, longs for them, represents their purpose, walks uprightly. Literally, Do not my words do good to him that is upright ? You must not only have right food, you must have the right appetite and the right digestion. God's revelation is lost upon the man who cares nothing for it. It is within the power of the eyelid to shut out the midday. If we had been upright we had been fat of soul, strong of mind, chivalrous and noble of heart, because we should have advanced according to our own quality ; being godlike we should have become godlier, we should have been perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect. The Bible has nothing to say to the froward soul. The revelation of God never talks to the critic. Intellect, unless a servant, has no business with things spiritual, supernatural, ineffable. Let every man then test himself by this one standard. The word of the Lord is meant to do good to the upright. Not necessarily to the personally perfect. There are no such people, except in their own estimation, and therefore there are none perfect at all. What is it to be upright then ? To be sincere, to mean to be right. There is a middle line in every man's thought and life and purpose. Do not judge him by the higher line or by the lower level ; you

will find the average thought and tendency and pressure—judge by that. When a man says, I want to be right, though I am falling seven times a day,—he is right. Take heart; you are looking at your sins, and saying you are a bad man; possibly not: there may be a thousand sins in your hand, and yet you may be a good man. Not if you love them, delight in them, give them hearty welcome day by day; but if you accept them as for the time being incidental to the bold, noble, strenuous struggle after the right, you are right, and your prayers shall win their way through all that black cloud of iniquity, and strike the eternal throne, prevalently, triumphantly. The Lord loves prayers that are battle-worn. There must be something pathetic to that great gentle Priest of ours, eternal Intercessor, when he takes up our prayers like bruised birds that have struck their wings against a thousand obstacles, but still have gone on and up, and are seeking rest in his intercession. Your bruised prayers are better than your cold ones, without scratch or flaw upon their finery of eloquence. God be merciful to me a sinner! is a prayer that will work its way right up, though the whole firmament be darkened with diabolic spirits and ministration. “Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?”—and to walk uprightly is not to walk pedantically, ostentatiously, and perfectly in the estimation of the world; but to walk uprightly is to have the stress of the soul in the right direction. O poor soul, thou art punctured and speared and bayoneted and bruised, but thou art still soul, fire, a flash eternal, unquenchable! Cheer thee; thy Saviour waits for thy latest prayer; it may be thy poorest in words, but thy strongest and best in intent and unction.

The entreaty proceeds to take upon itself the form of an accusation,—

“Even of late my people is risen up as an enemy” (ii. 8).

We might pass by that word as vague. In reality it is most definite. “Even of late”: literally, Even yesterday, so late as yesterday, we fought the Lord. Do not let us suppose that the Lord is charging upon us some sin done in some withered Eden. The account is written with ink that is not yet dry. It is a new charge, it is the most recent of accusations; there need be no falling back upon failing memory, saying, Forty years ago, fifty

years since, I am charged with having done a deed that is even now ripening into retribution ; my memory fails me : half a century is a long time to hold in one's mind. Do not talk so : never mind the deeds of half a century ; last night you struck at the eternal throne like a rebel—Even yesterday my people is risen up as an enemy. The Lord is not talking about some billows that rose a hundred years ago and foamed and swelled and roared and died ; he is speaking about a great black wave that threw its iniquity on the shore yesternight. We cannot escape God. It is the last thought that was against him. We can dispute any charge that is half a century old, but when the accusation is new as yesterday, yea, recent as the morning, who can answer it ? Nor let us think that God finds all his rebels somewhere else than within our own hearts, and souls, and houses, and businesses. What an interesting question this would be, though not to some minds, Is one man any better than another ? We can imagine with what redundancy of self-congratulation some men would answer an inquiry almost impertinent ; but when the smile of such dying radiance has gone, we simply repeat the inquiry, Is one man better than another ? Is John any better than Iscariot ? We are better in so many different ways, and it is the peculiarity of the way that often determines our estimate. The drunkard has no friends, yet he may be a better man than the Pharisee. The thief caught by the constabulary hand is driven off into prison, and properly ; but the bigger thief that puts his felonious hand into the souls of men goes to the sanctuary and repeats his worthless prayer. Who is it, then, that is really the upright man, the true man, and the good man ? The man who earnestly wants to be good—even if he were found helplessly drunk in the public thoroughfare, he must not be condemned on that account alone ; examine into the case, discover how it came to be, and, O thou dainty Pharisee, he may be a better man than thou art. What does his soul say ? what does his heart want ? what is the average line in the man's thought and purpose ? Blessed be God, we are not to judge, but we cannot keep our clever ingenuity from the throne of judgment, and we delight to add some increment to our virtue by condemning the vice of better men. Jesus Christ never found any respectable people who were really good. He distrusted them. If he dined with

them it was that he might have a larger opportunity for rebuking them. Yet there must be no licence given. When we are seeking to institute a proper standard and measure of consolation and encouragement, there must be no sanction given to wantonness in the interpretation of the divine law, or the uses of the divine liberty.

Now the Lord passes to retribution, and he utters words which have often been misquoted, and which have been turned into a proverb for the signification of anything but the original truth,—

“Arise ye, and depart: for this is not your rest” (ii. 10).

We have been taught that this world is not our resting-place, but rather a place of momentary halting, a place of probation, a school for the acquisition of elementary knowledge, the beginning of things, and that he is wrong who settles down here as if he had obtained a permanent refuge and an abiding home. All that is quite true; it is a lovely and a rational sentiment; that, however, is not the truth of this text. The Lord is punishing his people; he says, You have given no rest to others, you shall have no rest yourselves. We have seen that whilst men were lying in their beds devising iniquity, the Lord says, “I devise” (ii. 3). Bring that thought to bear upon the passage immediately before us, and the paraphrase would be this: You have given no rest to men, women, or children; what you have sown you shall reap. You have been unkind to others, and now you shall experience unkindness yourselves; you have been too pleased to drive men out into the wilderness, now you shall find your dwelling in sandy and stony places: “Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.” “Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.” A man must reap the harvest of his own seedtime. You cannot pray yourselves out of it. Do not pray to Nature. She has no answers, she has a great deaf ear; she will listen to you as long as you care to talk with appearance of being deeply interested in your speech, but in reality she does not hear a word of it; she is ruthless, relentless, a Shylock that cannot be shaken off by subtlety or casuistry of interpretation

of law. You killed, you shall be slain; you were pitiless, you shall be unpitied; you played the tyrant when you could, a foot shall be set on your own neck. Now talk to Nature; soothe her, pet her, coax her, bribe her, tell her all the nonsense that is in your heart, and still when you have ended she lifts her gleaming sword, and strikes for man and God. There may be temporary appearances to the contrary; the appearances, however, are but temporary. We do not take in field enough in judging God; it is not what he does to-day or to-morrow, in this decade or in that; he has no time. The river has no drops. You may have disturbed the river and broken it into drops, but the river is a unit; eternity rolls on, though now and again it has been shattered into the foam of so-called time. God will judge thee, thou whited sepulchre! It is delightful to the moral sense to find through the whole of the Old Testament the spirit of retribution going forward, saying, As I have done unto others, so the Lord hath done unto me; I cut off the thumbs and the great toes of seventy kings, and now my own must be cut off. God is just. Do not say he has forgotten yesterday; it is alway present to his mind.

Now the Lord passes from the people as a whole to the prophets:—

“Thus saith the Lord concerning the prophets that make my people err, that bite with their teeth, and cry, Peace; and he that putteth not into their mouths, they even prepare war against him. Therefore night shall be unto you, that ye shall not have a vision; and it shall be dark unto you, that ye shall not divine; and the sun shall go down over the prophets, and the day shall be dark over them. Then shall the seers be ashamed, and the diviners confounded: yea, they shall all cover their lips; for there is no answer of God” (iii. 5-7).

The biting here in the original is the biting of a serpent. The deterioration here indicated is the fall from a prophet to a viper. Such falls are possible, such apostasies are indeed the miracles of human story; but there they are, real, simple, indisputable, too obvious and too humiliating facts. The biting of a perverted man is the worst kind of biting. We say there is no zealot so mad as a pervert. There is no religion so tremendous as irreligiosity. It is this sour wine that becomes poison. Keep away from men who have been good, and have lost their religious and spiritual savour. They will cry anything that you want

them to cry. In this instance the prophets cried, "Peace," and if men did not praise them, they prepared war against the men who were hostile; if men did not give to them, men had to reckon for war. There is no man so bad as the fallen prophet. We are not speaking now of the temporary falls which seem to be incident to development of character honestly conducted, but to the men whose soul is turned away from love of truth and love of light. What is to be the consequence? The same law of retribution prevails:—

"Therefore night shall be unto you, that ye shall not have a vision; and it shall be dark unto you, that ye shall not divine; and the sun shall go down over the prophets, and the day shall be dark over them" (iii. 6).

So outer darkness is not a discovery of the New Testament. The unprofitable servant is there doomed to outer darkness, where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth; but here we have the same darkness—the darkness is of old; there is no new midnight. God will visit the prophet with darkness. When a genius is conscious that he has lost his inspiration there is no man so unhappy. The average ordinary man, whose life is a daily but not despicable commonplace, is not conscious of great losses, he never had great riches; but given a man once possessed with genius, and give him to feel that the angel is beyond him, outside of him, lifting glittering wings in eternal flight, and the moment of such consciousness is hell. The Lord sends night upon the prophets, and a prophet without light is in perdition; a prophet without his mantle is naked, not in body, but in soul.

What shall become of these prophets? "They shall cover their lips." The action is that of a leper. The leper was commanded to cover his lips and to cry, Unclean, unclean! The Lord's charge is: The lip has lied, cover it; the lip of the prophet has been prostituted to falsehood—cover it, conceal it. See, the prophets that ought to have led the age are like lepers with bent heads, calling, Unclean, unclean! God will not have any bad service. He will not allow men to come in with genius to assist in the interpretation of his kingdom if genius be not sustained by honest goodness; not by that perfection which is the worst kind of imperfection, but by that perfectness of wish which is the guarantee of attainment. A man in London said

that he himself was so good, so full of the Holy Spirit, that he did not believe that even God himself could increase the blessing. I no sooner heard it than I said, That's a bad man, whoever he is. I did not know the man, but I said a man who can talk so is a bad man; and alas! that poor wretch was soon revealed. Do not let us aim at that kind of perfection. The more perfect we are the more modest we shall be, the more silent about ourselves. The more perfect a man is in the sight of God the more he feels any blemish or speck or flaw, and things he would not have seen aforetime now constitute his agony.

The Lord's accusation ends with this awful word, namely :—

"They build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity" (iii. 10).

The Lord will not have a Zion so built. The meaning is that these men have gone forth to war and to bloodshed and desolation and so-called conquest, and then have baptised all their iniquity with the name of God, and have brought their spoils, and laid them up in Zion, and the Lord will not have them. Or the meaning is that men have been extortionate—they have oppressed the poor; they have overreached the weak; and they have given a tenth of their profits to the building of the walls of Jerusalem. The Lord will not accept such offerings. Are there men who have served the devil with both hands earnestly, and have grown fat and bloated in his service, and do they atone for all by a cheque of a thousand pounds to God's temple! Burn it! Yet there is a vulgarity that feeds its piety by writing enormous cheques. The larger the cheque the better, if it be given with an honest hand; then every coin of gold is worth ten times its nominal amount, then every copper piece is gold, because of the touch of honesty and the pain of sacrifice; but if a man shall eat and drink, and fill his house with devils, and become tired, sated, and shall seek to pay off the Lord's sword, he will soon be made to feel what a fool he is. The Lord will have none of him. The walls of the sanctuary must be built with honest stone and laid with honest hands, then God will take care of it; but if even Zion be built with blood it shall be burned with fire. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God; yet the most joyous and glorious thing if our hearts be filled with a sincere desire to know his will and do it.

PRAYER.

UNTO thee, O Lord, is our prayer directed; hear thou in heaven thy dwelling-place, and when thou hearest, Lord, forgive. It is a prayer from the heart which thou thyself hast given us to pray. We pray to know thee more clearly, to follow thee more steadfastly, to serve thee more obediently. This is the Lord's prayer; this is no prayer of our own selfishness; this also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, bearing upon its every letter the sign that God did teach it to our hearts. We pray this prayer, as all others, that are true and honest, at the Cross, the great altar, the blessed mercy-seat; there prayer is its own answer, prayer is turned into praise; the intercession of Christ magnifies our requests, and assures their fulfilment, according to the wisdom and tenderness of God. If we ask aught amiss thou dost not call it prayer, and thou wilt not answer our ignorance; if we ask aught aright it is of thy teaching; if we ask it at the Cross we have it whilst we are yet pleading for it. This is the mystery of thy love; this is the wonder and the miracle of prayer. Lord, hear us when we ask to be forgiven: the load of yesterday is too heavy for our strength, the shadow of our iniquity plunges us into sevenfold night; but where sin abounds, doth not grace much more abound? Can any black billows of iniquity overtop the Cross? Doth it not rise high above all oceans of wickedness? Is it not a sign that the mercy of the Lord endureth for ever? Truly men have wandered far from thee, but thou canst find them in their lost estate, and bring them back with rejoicing. This is the purpose of the Gospel, this is the one object of the Son of God—he came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance; they that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. He came to seek and to save the lost; Lord, he came therefore to seek and to save us. All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way; there is none righteous, no, not one. Thou hast come after us, thou Son of man, thou Son of God; seek us until thou dost find us, and restore us to the household we have left. Be with us all the day; give insight, strength, wisdom, force of character; give us sensitiveness, that we may feel the life that is round about us. Create within us Christly sympathies, that we may answer all the need and distress that mark the days through which we pass, and give us the living, holy, eternal Spirit, that our bodies may become his temples, and our minds his dwelling-place. These are great requests, but they touch not the boundlessness of thy love; in so far as they are pure and wise thou wilt give us the answer ere we say Amen.

CHAPTERS iv., v.

THE GLORY OF THE CHURCH.

WE cut up our time into days and years, little spaces and periods, and we magnify them exceedingly by the trifling incidents which occur within them ; but to the prophetic gaze the whole question of time was divided into two—the first days, and the last days ; the days before Christ, and the days after Christ. As to all that went between, it was matter of detail and necessary progress, and sequential development. How much we lose by frittering away our time by a frivolous division into parts, and minor parts, and major parts ! Thus we are vexed by detail, exceedingly tormented, and our minds are clouded, and the horizon is shut out, and we are the victims of little views and small conceptions and narrow prejudices. Why do we live in the valley when we might live on the hilltop ? The higher we ascend the more distant is the view. There is poetry in distance, there is music in the horizon ; but who can find anything in smoke and cloud and fog but depression and fear, and loss of those higher enthusiasms that ought to rule our life. Arise, awake ! Climb any hill that you can get your feet upon ; it is good to be much in the upper air. Politically and socially, we are always beginning and ending ; we are in a circle of elections and depositions and reconstructions, but in the spirit of our Lord we are seated with himself upon the circle of eternity, and oh, how small everything appears far away yonder ! Yet what trouble the inhabitants are in ! how they are voting and canvassing and knocking at each other's doors, and exciting one another in momentary fury about nothing ! Yet if all this inferior and temporary business must be done it can be best done in the spirit of eternity. It is when we have been most in heaven that we can most effectually and successfully handle the affairs of time. All depends upon the point of approach : if we approach the work from below it will be all uphill toil ; if we descend upon it from communion with God we shall bring the whole stress of our strength to bear upon it, and a touch will have in it the force of a battering-ram. Why all this toiling, and upheaving, and struggling, and strenuous endeavour, when life might be

made a joy; when life might be made to grow the flower of peace and the fruit of plenty, and the whole action might be a movement of triumph? Men will not be right until they are geometrically right; they must have the right point of origin; they must put themselves into proper figure; they must accept something that was in the universe before they came consciously into it; they must receive, and adore, and obey the will of God. The prophets looked forward to Christ, and we do just the same. We talk about ancient prophets—there is nothing in the world but prophecy. Yet we have in our transient wisdom classified men into major prophets and minor prophets, and we go to the Old Testament for prophets of all sorts and qualities, forgetting that Jesus Christ is the greatest Prophet of all, and that Christians are still in the region of prophecy, and that if we could get out of the region of prophecy, we should soon get into the region of monotony, and the region of monotony lies close to the region of despair. It is hope that saves us; it is prophecy that gives us all our music and higher cheer and nobler enthusiasm; it is the beyond that holds our home, and it will be the beyond eternities hence. To see the invisible is to live; to lay hold of the eternal is to be safe for evermore.

“But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established” (iv. 1).

There is a word wanting there; at least, the word is wanting in the English. The word was in the language of the prophet and in the tone of the prophet. The word “established” may be accepted as conveying a sense of only temporary security. We speak of our establishments, we speak of an established institution; but in so using the term we are aware that the establishment is regulated by certain unwritten and necessary laws, which govern the rise, the flourishing, and the decay of empire and institution. Micah used a word which means abidingly established, for ever firm, eternally secure. Not established even as a mountain is established, for mountains were planted that they might be torn up. Below the mountain there is a fire mightier than they, and that gleesome, grim, playful fire makes toys of the mountains, shapes them and reshapes them, lifts them up and tears them down; and yet

we speak of the everlasting hills. Micah is now speaking of an eternal settlement, a position that never can be disturbed, part and parcel of the duration, because part and parcel of the quality of God. Where shall the mountain of the Lord's house be established?—on “the top of the mountains.” Whatever is on the top of the mountain is higher than the mountain. A child standing on the Andes, or Teneriffe, or Himalayan glories, is higher than they all. The little child looks down upon the mountain it stands upon; the mountain was never so high as that child is. Here is the mountain of the house of the Lord; it is a mountain upon a mountain. The house of the Lord itself is spoken of under the figure of a mountain, and the mountains of the earth have to carry the mountain of God. They are all his; he made the staircase as well as the temple; he made the vestibule as well as the palace; he made the earth first, and then he built upon it; he made the mountain first, and then he set his Church on the top of it. The meaning is, that the Church is to be the uppermost institution, the sanctuary of God is to be at the top of things, and out of it is to come law; out of it also is to come the spirit of righteousness, and out of it, day by day, is to come the spirit of peace, the spirit of benediction. We must be right at the top, or we never can be right elsewhere. Given a proper sovereignty, a rule of righteousness, truth, beauty, love, music, honour, and we shall have a world at peace. Who is on the throne? is the uppermost question. Who reigns? What governs?—for the “what” in that case is larger than the “who.” Say righteousness is on the throne, and the earth may be at peace; say the highest interests of humanity as a whole are represented by the throne, and no misfortune can befall that symbol of majesty. Every Church that is selfish must be torn down; nay, may we change the phrase, and say, Why tear it down? Time is against it; the ages coming and going are against it; the spirit of liberty is against it; Providence is against it. Distress not thyself, therefore, with any tearing down violence, for all bad institutions, political, ecclesiastical, theological, social, will fall, and no man shall care to look into their dishonoured graves.

What a wonderful forecast was this on the part of the villager

Micah ! The prophecies of these men seem to my own mind not only to suggest, but to confirm their inspiration. This is not only talk. Here are men that shoot out above us all, miles and miles beyond. They are in the heavens, whilst we are on the earth. Yet they were unlearned men—they were rustics, they were villagers; they laid down their credentials, and in those credentials there is nothing of so-called ancestral and hereditary glory. But how they lived ! They sat down as guests at the banqueting-table of the ages. Micah, the villager, comes and sits down at the latter-day feast; he is a guest of the Lord, and takes part in the song of festival. We might have more joys if we understood that all things are ours. All time belongs to the children of light. We are not bounded by the little grey dewy morning of the present; we have all the mornings that ever grew in the garden of the horizon. We are only poor because we are faithless. If we had faith we should have all time, all strength, all confidence, and all peace. Lord, increase our faith.

What does Micah see? Whole nations coming to the Lord, and saying to one another,—

“Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem” (iv. 2).

Here is a popular sentiment; here is, indeed, a universal sentiment. At present our ideal Christian life is represented by a one-man ministry. If you close your eyes, and look upon the ideal Church of to-day, it is that there shall be a congregation, and one man shall be addressing it; and that one man shall sustain the position of exhorter, and in high, poignant, hortatory tones he shall call men, and warn men, and bless men. Micah saw a much larger ministry; he said, The time will come when the people will exhort one another; when all the congregations shall mutually excite one another to higher enthusiasm and nobler endeavour. Wherever you meet a man he will say, Come to the mountain of the house of the Lord; wherever you see an assembly of men they shall, with one concurrent and dominating voice, say, Come ! and their call will be to festival, to banqueting,

to the holy rite of harmonious joy in the living Saviour. What wonder that Micah was rich and strong, and full of peace and gladness! The image is one of an inspiring kind.

What shall happen when this mountain of the house of the Lord is exalted on the top of the mountains? This shall come to pass,—

“And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (iv. 3).

How is that result brought about? Not by argument, not by voting, not by overwhelming majorities; it is brought about as a detail—it is part of something else, it is the issue of a certain all-inclusive process. The third verse is in the second verse: let the mountain of the house of the Lord be in its right place, and all other things shall adjust themselves to the genius that presides and governs. We have been working at the wrong end too much; we have been trying to do things in parts that were never meant to be done, except as in relation to sublimer movements. Let the temple of the Lord be in the right place; let it be rightly defined as the sanctuary of righteousness and judgment, the abode of law and the home of pureness and peace, and then all other things will fall into harmonic and helpful relation. We cannot carry on our poor shoulders the universe; it is impossible for us to hasten millenniums to any appreciable extent. We lose ourselves so much in false enthusiasm. The thing to be remembered is this, that you never can have peace until you have righteousness; you cannot have a happy earth until that earth is governed by eternal and indestructible principles: if you think you can, then you will have reformatations, and insignia, and paraphernalia, and clubs, and arrangements of divers social kinds, all of which may be momentarily pleasant. They will never bring in the millennium. Only one thing can carry the earth, and that is gravitation. Gravitation will pick it up, but your hands cannot, your institutions cannot, your politics cannot; only one thing keeps the universe right, and sends it whirling through its musical revolutions, and that is gravitation. Gravitation can pick up a thousand universes, and hold them all—

in fact, it can make them hold one another; but we, with our poor shoulders, yea, with both of them, cannot carry the tiniest planet. Better come to an understanding about this whole business of reformation, elevation, education, and progress. Nothing is right until it is religiously right. By religiously right do not understand any mean, detestable, and utterly unworthy sectarian interpretation of the term. Dismiss all meddlers, welcome all helpers; but know that nothing is right until it is right in its soul. All compromises, adjustments, and temporary relationships are but for a moment. That is right which is religiously true; that is right which God pronounces very good.

What comes after peace? Security:—

“But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid” (iv. 4).

The vine and the fig tree were children of Palestine, they were the typical plants of the country; and every man shall have his own vine growing by his own door, and putting out its leafage so plentifully that it can curl itself around the trellis-work of the portico, and the old grey-haired sire shall sit and think over the past, and forecast the future, and meditate in the law of the Lord, the very air itself being a speechless benediction. There shall be personal security, there shall be a sense of nearness to God; but all coming out of the proper establishment of the house of the Lord. If that house had not been on the top of the mountains you could not have had the vine and fig tree; or if you had the vine and fig tree they would have been no security. If you had no sun you could have no violet. Is that little blue-eyed thing born in the sun? Yes. If you had no solar system you could have no daisies in the meadow, no redbreasts, no larks, no songs in the air. Do not look at the violet and say, “Bless thee, sweet little blue-eyed stranger, we are glad to see thee,”—and think that it is not part of the solar system: it eats at the table of the angels, it is a guest in the household of the Father; it is a snip of the sun, one infinitesimal glint of his infinite light. So you could not have your vine and fig tree if you had not the mountain of the house of the Lord established

on the top of the mountains. Religion carries everything with it. It is a true religious settlement that gives you your home, your cottage, your palace; it is the spirit of righteousness that hangs your walls with pictures; it is the spirit of goodness that makes it possible for the poorest man to have one poor little pot of flowers on his sloping window-sill. Look at things in their right relations. Seize the bigness and unity of all things. Otherwise, what shall happen to you? You will be the victims of detail and accident and incident and hap, and you will say, Chance thus, and thus it fell out. Nothing of the kind. Why do you not live in the sanctuary? Why do you not find your habitation in eternity?

"For all people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever" (iv. 5).

Why not? Do not worldly men excel us in this matter of brute courage? It is difficult for the worldly man to keep down his vulgarity. He will chaffer about the market-place before he leaves the church; he will say his creed. The worldly man is not afraid to speak about his markets, and his bargains, and his chances, his profits and his successes; is the Christian to be a dumb soul that has nothing to say about the living Lord? The worldly man will talk about his unclean little deities, his chance and his fortune, his opportunities and his investments, and his progress and his sagacity, and he will revel in the detestable pantheon of his own imagination and idolatry; and shall Christian men have nothing to say about righteousness and truth, the all-grouping and all-controlling Cross? If dumbness were piety, Christianity may be said to have won the day.

Now comes the great evangelical prophecy. Hear it, and remember who spake it:—

"But thou, Beth-lehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (v. 2).

If we were not familiar with these words they would be amongst the grandest utterances of the ages; we know them so well that we miss their meaning. We are: oo frivolous. We

have seen the sun so often that we now never look at him ; we have been so many mornings in the world, that morning comes to us with no song, no poetry, no new testament just written with the blood of the heart of God. "But" should be "And." Nor is the word "and" a simple conjunctive in grammar ; it is a conjunctive in history, in genius, in spiritual intent,—“And thou, Beth-lehem Ephratah.” Thus the events are run into one another. We slip up history by our disjunctives. “But” we assign as dividing a sentence ; Micah says “and.” Many a chapter begins with “and.” The little pedantic grammarian says “and” ought not to begin a sentence ; but the great grammarians, the spiritual interpreters of ages and eternities, make all grammar bend itself to their uses. Chapter iii. begins “And.” Thus we get the unity of history, the solidarity of events. One thing belongs to another : Bethlehem, thou art very little, but out of thee shall come the greatest Man that ever lived ; Bethlehem, thou art not worthy to be counted among the Gileads of Judah, but out of thy little thousand there shall stand a man who shall rule all men. There is a wonderful spirit of compensation in providence. God is saying to each of us, Though thou art poor, thou mayest be wise ; though thou art slow, thou mayest be painstaking and persevering ; thou art—though misunderstood by men—thou art fully comprehended by thy Father. Look for the “though” in every history ; look for the compensation in every life. “. . . From of old, from everlasting”—here is pre-existence ; the whole mystery of the Gospel is here ; for here we have eternity, personality, a historical point ; we have the divine before the human. In the Old Testament language God is called by a very simple term—the God of Before. You cannot amend that phrase ; do not paint that lily, bring no tinsel to that gold. If we cannot understand the term “Eternity” because of its vastness and its sublimity, we have some inkling of the meaning of the word “before.” Of the Saviour, the Nazarene, the Man of Sorrows, of him who was acquainted with grief, whose face was marred more than any man’s, it is said he was “before all things.” Here is the altar at which we worship, nor are we ashamed to render homage here.

PRAYER.

Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah ? This that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength ? He is mighty to save ; he is the Son of man, who came not into the world to destroy men's lives, but to save them. The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost. He is the good Shepherd ; he giveth his life for the sheep. We do not know the meaning of all his words, but we feel them as we feel the power of love ; we know them without knowing them ; they are answered by our hearts : we feel that we need all his speech, all his life, all the miracle of his priesthood. We have done the things we ought not to have done ; he alone is the Daysman between the offending soul and the offended law. We have heard of him with the hearing of the ear, and when we have seen him with the eyes of our heart we have fallen down before him as men abase themselves before a great glory. He is the Son of God ; he is called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. We love his name ; with tears and heart-brokenness we bow down before his Cross ; it is the image of law, the image of love, the sign of righteousness, the token of mercy. This is love, this is the condescension of God. We look unto Christ, and are lightened ; we bring our sins to him, and never take them away again ; he is the Saviour of the world ; he puts his arms round about the race he redeemed, and none can pluck a soul from his keeping. We are safe in the arms of Jesus ; locked in his hand, we are safe eternally. In such thoughts would we find light, consolation, peace, encouragement ; we would not receive them as topics of contemplation, but as stimulants to action, calls to service, challenges to sacrifice. Thus would we have the gospel of Christ in our hearts, a call to labour, to suffering, to heroism, and to all the joy that comes of agony for others. The Word of the Lord is a living Word ; the tumults of the ages cannot disturb it ; its pulse throbs amid the activities of the generations, and is not to be stilled, for it is the eternal life. May we hear the gospel, now and again—a great call, a tender voice, a loving whisper, a martial blast, the very wonder of the glory of God. May thy Word comfort human hearts and direct human steps, and bring all the uproar and shapelessness of life into form and beauty and living colour, so that we may see God in all things, and hear his voice in the storm. Grant consolation unto thy servants according to their daily need ; make the home a church ; make the market-place a sanctuary ; make the chamber of affliction the very nearest chamber in the house towards heaven. May sorrow bring messages which prosperity could never deliver. May all the way of life show itself to have been first trodden by the feet of the Son of

God. He is our glory, our redemption, our propitiation; he is the door, the bread of life, the truth, the way to the upper places, the shepherd of the sheep, the vine whose blood is for our hearts' cheering. Help us to know the Saviour more and more, to live more nearly as he lived, to represent him in temper, spirit, purpose, action, in all the course of changeable time. These prayers we pray, where prayers become their own answers, at the Cross of Christ, at the gate of heaven. Amen.

Chapter vi. 6-8.

"Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

HYPOCRITICAL EAGERNESS.

"**W**HEREWITH shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God?" What a delightful state of mind! Here is a man asking himself the greatest of all possible questions. "Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old?" The only question which I have to put is, How to come before God? I want to come before him; I long to see him; I wish to do the will of God. "Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil?"—only let him say how many rams he wants, and how much oil would please him, for my supreme question is, Wherewith shall I come before God, and bow myself before his majesty? How spiritually delightful; how sentimentally blessed; how beauteous in outline; how tender and suggestive in all high colouring of thought and purpose! Not at all. You are as far wrong as you can be. There is nothing of that tone in the text. How stands the matter then? It stands as a picture of hypocritical eagerness. This is all hypocrisy. The figure is very graphic, and may be seen almost by the eyes of the body, certainly by the vision of a fancy that is just beginning to take in the real magnitude, proportion, and colour of historical objects. Here is a people, lacerated, flogged into a kind of religious considerateness, and now they are each asking for himself the question, "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God?" Let me see if I can answer that

inquiry ; let us take counsel upon the subject if you please. And one says, " Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old ? " That is a very excellent suggestion. Now what do you say ? " Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams ? " That is very liberal. What do you say ? What would he say to ten thousands of rivers of oil ? Well, if that would not overcome him, and make a friend of him, I think the case is absolutely hopeless. Whoever heard of ten thousands of rivers of oil ? I am overwhelmed by the thought myself, and I suppose that the Deity cannot be much less overwhelmed than I am. What do you say ? " Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul ? " Would you ? Yes ! What would you do ? I would slay every child I have got if that would please the Lord, and I may continue drinking and body-feasting and robbery and oppression ; he might take every child in the house. This is the counsel. The question is partly an intellectual one, partly a moral one, and here is a self-constituted conference or debating society, and one man proposes to come before the Lord with burnt offerings and with calves of a year old ; another proposes to contribute thousands of rams ; and another has conceived the magnificent idea of making a whole Ganges of oil ; and last of all, a man comes ready to commit murder, filicide ; he will kill his children one by one ; the very firstborn that ought to inherit the name and the property may go down under the knife just as soon as anybody else, if the Lord will only allow the murderer to drink and feast and enjoy himself at the devil's table. That is the right explanation of the passage.

Now upon all this inquiry there comes an answer ; say if it come not from another world : " He hath showed thee, O man, what is good ; "—do not make a mystery of it—" and what doth the Lord require of thee"—calves of a year old, thousands of rams, ten thousands of rivers of oil, thy firstborn for thy transgression ? no—" but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." That is a right religion. You cannot get behind that. All controversy, all resentful intellectualism, all selfish calculation, all vicious political Christianity must fall before that sublime revelation. You do not understand

the last part of the text until you have really got into the meaning of the former. The answers are contrastive. Consider the case well, and get it vividly before the mind before attempting to press the incident to its highest uses. On the one side you have a number of ceremonialists, hypocrites who are willing to pay for religion, men who are prepared to buy themselves off from the highest duty and the most strenuous discipline. See, they have their hands in their pockets, and they say, What doth God want—calves? There is the money to buy a whole field full. Ten thousands of rams? Here is gold, go and buy up the cattle markets of the world. Ten thousands of rivers of oil? Let him have them, Ganges and Amazons, and Mississippis, and let the oil flow like a sullen beauty through all the meads of earth; if he likes oil let him have it. Another man gets to another point, supposed to be still further on, and says, Does he want sons and daughters? I am prepared to play Abraham—he can have them all. The Lord says, This is all wrong: keep your calves and your rams and your rivers of oil, and lay not a finger upon any child you have; all I want is that thou shouldst, O man, do justly, and love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God. My thought is not as your thought, neither are my ways as your ways; for as the heaven is high above the earth, so is my thought high above your thought, and my way above your way. Let the wicked forsake his way, let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. You cannot appease God with calves and rams; you cannot lubricate your way to heaven by ten thousands of rivers of oil: the great settlement must be upon moral bases—justice and mercy and humble-heartedness. We thought we had in the first instance a picture of earnest men, really anxious and solicitous inquirers as to the way to heaven. Learn from this the possibility of our repeating this hypocrisy. There are men who are willing to give any number of thousands of pounds to charitable institutions if you will not call upon them for any moral tribute; they will pay handsomely if you will leave their character in their own keeping, and assure them of heaven at the last. And this cannot be done. Behold the severity of the divine requirement, and yet its gentleness, and its thoroughness, and its clemency, and yet its comprehensiveness.

Look at this answer as revealing the character of God himself. We shall know what God is by inquiring what he requires of us. We say water cannot rise above its own level—a character cannot rise above itself, though it may make many fantastic and ridiculous attempts to do so; and God will in asking his questions and putting his propositions reveal himself in the very doing of it. What then does God want? Justice, mercy, condescension. Is God just? He wants men to be just; he must therefore be just himself. Let his providence reply. We must not take providence to pieces. There is a vicious and absurd system of analysis which misses the great purpose, by wasting itself upon the incidental and often insignificant detail. God's great scale of measurement must be apprehended before you can estimate any one thing God himself does in the administration of his economy. It is impossible to draw a straight line. We have often shown that men who suppose they are drawing straight lines are doing nothing of the kind; it is only straight within given points; but if we had the right eye, the lens properly adjusted, we should see that any line purporting to be straight is part of a circle. The earth on which the line is drawn is itself a sphere; who can draw a straight line upon a globe? We are victimised by distance and by size, and by much intermediate action of light and cloud and wind, the whole mystery of atmosphere, so that we do not oftentimes know what we are talking about, even when we erect ourselves and say, These are facts. Take care lest facts make fools of you; be sure first of the facts. So in judging the justice of God we must not take this instance or that instance, or some particular decade of history, either favourable or unfavourable; it would seem as if God, when he turned over a page, turned over a thousand years. We must await the sum-total. We do not audit our house every five minutes of the day; we must let the allotted period run its course, and then say, How stands the account? God's appeal is to the everlasting; we must follow him into his own court. Is God merciful? He demands that men should walk in mercy, in the spirit of love, pity, compassion, tenderness. Is God himself merciful? Let history reply; let our own consciences be heard herein, and let us look back upon our own handful of days that we call our life, and who will not say, Goodness and mercy have followed me all

the days of my life? God was good when he gave, and good when he denied; the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, and, now that we have had a little time to think about it, blessed be the name of the Lord? The planted body is a planted flower, the tomb is the richest part of the garden; he hath done all things well. And does he walk humbly with men? He does: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus; who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." None has stooped so lowly as God.

Taking the text, therefore, as a revelation of the character of the Speaker himself, we may say that God does in his own economy and sphere what he asks us to do in ours; he has shown thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

What does this revelation do? It does away with all ostentatious piety. Many of us would be glad to buy ourselves off from judgment. We may not put the question into words; it is not, therefore, less a question of the soul. What can I buy my liberty for? No amount of oil shall stand between me and release; no number of calves and rams shall for a moment deter me from paying the fine, if so be I can have the arrow drawn out of my heart and the poison withdrawn from my blood. The Lord will not have this. He does not want your gaiety, but your simplicity; he does not want you to drive up to his door in chariot of gold and with steeds of fire that he may receive your patronage; he sends word down to you by the first and humblest servant he lights upon—Go and say all I want is that thou shalt do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God. This will take all the paint off our religion; this will deplete our decoration; this will leave us in ruins as to external appearance; but there are ruins that are true palaces. It will do away with all our ostentation of another kind than that which is merely physical, orna-

mental, or decorative; it will do away with all our intellectual contributions and displays of patronage in reference to the Cross. The Cross does not want your intellectual homage; the Cross says, with heartbroken pathos, Stand out of the way, that guilty self-condemned sinners may see me. No sooner does the Cross become intellectualised than it breeds infidels by the thousand. The Cross is God's heart. O man, veil thy reason, and make it bend with thee in lowliest reverence and worship; then when it speaks it will speak with finer eloquence, with nobler strength, its self-distrust will be the first element of its majesty and usefulness.

What does this revelation do, in the second place? It vindicates God from the charge of delighting in animal sacrifices. Will the Lord be pleased with burnt offerings and calves of a year old? or will he be pleased with thousands of rams? Does he love to see the smoking hecatomb? No; when he has required blood of a merely animal kind it has always been symbolically, typically, or prefigurately; it was a necessary part of the alphabet of spiritual history. He must begin his lessons where the scholar can begin. He began his account of creation where the babies of the world could begin. If he had told us about fire-mist and protoplasm, he would have defeated his own object, and there would have been no Bible thousands of years ago; so he just set up the heavens and the earth as we could understand them in some little degree, and he said, It is better they should begin where they can rather than not begin at all, and as they go through the ages they will be able to understand figure and type and parable and dream, and find in colour and in music the truest, widest, grandest facts. The Lord is not pleased with the blood of calves and of rams. He turned from it; he said, I cannot away with your ceremonies and oblations rendered only by your fancy or by your hand. Everything the Lord did require of a physical and external kind was only in a temporary sense, the whole thought of God leading up to spirituality. "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

What does this answer do, in the third place? It destroys the

notion of piety by proxy:—"Shall I give my firstborn for my transgressions, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" We are always willing to make away with other people; we are exceedingly liberal with the lives of others. We philosophise and theorise with admirable serenity, as if we had abundance of leisure in which to contemplate the tragedy of mankind, and we say, If a thousand perish, and ten thousand be saved, the gain is on the side of salvation. No! That is false; that is a misuse of the principle of majorities. There ought to be no man lost. And no man will be lost but the son of perdition. If after the Lord has dealt with a man by his providence and by his Spirit, and by all the mystery of the Cross, there is found in that man nothing but devil, he must go to his own place and to his own company. But the Lord will do the handling upon a scale we cannot comprehend, and if the Lord gives up any human soul we may well say sadly, Amen.

Reading this passage, does any man say, Then the way is most easy? Do justice, love mercy, walk humbly with God—why, here is alphabetic piety. How foolish is such talk! Is it easy to be just? The question is not, Is it easy to be nearly just, almost just—just upon the whole—taking in life as it goes, there is no doubt that on the average there is justice? That is not the inquiry at all. To do justly between man and man, to do justly to thyself—there is an ease that holds in it all the difficulty of the most complete and strenuous discipline, and we never know how difficult such ease is until we try to work it out in detail. What have you done? Hold up your deeds to the sun. Many things look well in artificial light which do not look well in the noonday blaze. Examine your justice in the light of the sun; not in the light of a clouded sun, but when the sun is in its summer fulness, when there is least of cloud about him, when every beam is a dazzling revelation, then hold up your finest morality—and be ashamed of it. Is it natural to be just? Or is it natural for strength to triumph over weakness? Is there not a high and mighty philosophy which says, The weakest must go to the wall; if there is any survival it must be the survival of the fittest; we cannot stop the progress of the world in order to accommodate ourselves to the weakness of imbeciles; we make

an offer, we make it in haste ; we say, Take it or leave it, and the answer must be given before the clock strikes the next hour ? Is that justice ? Are there no slow-moving minds ? Are there not some minds that do not know themselves, and that require not to be despised, but to be sustained ? Is there not a justice that sits down beside ignorance, and says, You do not know all the case ; I will show you what you ought to be and to do and to ask ? What, is a man to be both buyer and seller in one ? Yes, O thou proud, sharp-dealing, clever thief—yes ! That would put an end to business. So much the better. We have had “business” enough ; we want now a little justice and commonwealth and brotherhood and sympathy. That would take away the crown from some men. Better be without it. They are not kings, they are clowns. Let the crown go, and then they will begin to see themselves as they are. But some men are nothing but sharpness ; then let them play their sharpness upon themselves. They have no right in the sanctuary ; in the sanctuary justice sits down beside ignorance, and helps ignorance to make the best of its little possession. Is it natural to be merciful ? Who does not like to assert his mastery ? Mercy stops that it may do good ; mercy says, Have you had enough, or could you take more ? Do you require a softer pillow for your aching head ? Shall I stay with you all night until the morning come ? then your other friends will gather around you. Mercy has no clock ; mercy has no scales by which to mete out the exact pound ; mercy is the other name of love—mercy is love in tears, mercy is pity that cannot speak because of the sob of its sympathetic grief.

“What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God ?”—not intellectually, not as who should say, We understand the mysteries of providence, and if you do not, well, what can ignorance expect ? The greatest Christian should be the humblest. There need be no difficulty in going before a great man. “Take those children away,” said the disciples : “Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not,” was the word of the Master. There is no difficulty with the Master. You insist upon seeing the Master himself. If you see the little priest at

the door he will forbid you, and drive you away; go right past him, and ask for the Master. You will have no difficulty with Jesus. Simon said, This man is not a prophet; if he were a prophet he would know who, and what manner of woman this is, for she is a sinner. And Jesus said, "She hath loved much, and her sins are all forgiven her." The multitude murmured that he is gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner; and Jesus said, He also—little rich Zacchæus—hath a heart, he also is a son of Abraham. You have never seen the Master perhaps. You have seen the minister, the ecclesiastic, the preacher, the priest, the fool who thinks he has the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and he only can open the door into the light. O man, thou couldst see Christ, thou couldst work thy way to the Cross, and if thy faith be small this thou couldst say: I may not speak, to him, or throw my arms around him, or be on reverential familiarity with him; but if I may only touch the hem of his garment, the little craspedon corner, I shall be made whole. That is the mystery. Christ's Godhead is in every word he spake; Christ's deity is in every look he bestows upon man; Christ's eternity is in every tone of his voice. Oh, touch him—touch him somewhere, anywhere, but with the finger of faith, and though thou hast had flux of blood, leprosy, lameness, destitution of soul, whatever be thy complaint, thou shalt be made whole. This is the Gospel. Let us preach it with fearlessness and with tender love.

Chapter vi. 9-15.

THE PERILS OF WEALTH.

“**H**EAR ye the rod, and who hath appointed it.” Do not be atheistical in the time of affliction. The “rod” means judgment. Sometimes judgment takes the form of chastening. We are not always to suppose that the rod means mere punishment—an action of the strong upon the weak, or the righteous upon the wicked; the rod may be an instrument of education as well as of vengeance and of penalty. Do not suppose that the devil holds the rod. The devil is the weakest of all creatures: his is only the strength of boisterousness; there is nothing in it of abiding pith, stability, real power. The devil is a chained enemy. Afflictions do not spring out of the dust. When the rod is lacerating your back, ask, What wilt thou have me to do? When all things are dull and distressing and disappointing, say, This is the ministry of God: he is taking out of me some elements of vanity, which are always elements of weakness, and he is conducting me to the altar by a subterranean passage. We do not always go to the altar along pathways of flowers; not always does God beckon us through a garden to follow him to some chosen place of real communion. Sometimes we are driven to the altar; often we do not want to pray: the soul will take no rest, and give none, until a great, sweet, holy, burdened prayer has gone up to heaven by way of the Cross. Is the rod lying heavily upon your house now? Know ye the rod, and him who hath appointed it; examine yourselves carefully and searchingly, and see if there be any wicked way in you, and drag it out, it will rot in the sunlight. If, on the other hand, you can hold by your integrity like the Psalmist of old, if you can wrestle with God as did Jacob, saying, I cannot tell why this has come upon me, the answer will be more abundant than your petition. Magnify the Cross at midnight.

In this instance, however, there is a good deal of immorality behind everything, and explaining the whole action of divine visitation and penalty. The questions that follow are thunderbolts :—

“Are there yet the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the scant measure that is abominable?” (ver. 10).

The reason why the rod is lifted up is that the ephah is made lean; that is to say, the measure is cut down a little, even if it be by so much as the rim, so that the poor are paying for goods they do not receive. God will not have this economy. We may even call it political economy, but he calls it robbery. God is very frank; there is no circumlocution in the divine speech. When the thief has shaken down the ephah, so that he can save almost half an ephah in every thousand measures he sells, he says, It is so very small that no one particular customer or client can possibly miss it, and yet when you come to thousands the profit in return to myself is very considerable. I am not injuring any one in particular; I am simply gathering up littles. The Lord says, Liar! thief! They are not polite words, but sin has never entitled itself to be spoken to politely. “Scant measure”: that is a minor morality, is it not? As men become metaphysical they become self-deceived; in proportion as men become very clever they become too clever. So we have distributed morality into major and minor; it is an awful thing to steal so that you can be found out, but to make the ephah short, to make the measure scant, and do it so skilfully that nobody will be able to charge you with it, is a minor offence. We are the victims of our own acuteness, even upon the bench of judgment, as well as in the sanctuary of righteousness. Hence we speak of minor offences, first offences, venial offences. Is there any such classification in the Bible? Not to be an inspired book, according to the theory of some, it is wonderfully fierce with wrongdoing: verily it might have been inspired; it is so just, it stands by and says, Put another handful in there. If we reply there is no room for it, the Bible says, Press down what is already in the ephah, and you will find room for it. That is a very curious theology. It is the only theology worth maintaining, unless it be followed to its natural consequence, which means the true worship, devout homage, rendered to God,

and a spiritual acceptance of all the mysteries of the Cross of Christ. The Lord will not be content with a fine spiritual, doctrinal orthodoxy. There are men who suppose that if they believe in the supernatural they may plunder anybody. There are those who turn purple in the face when they encounter a denial of the supernatural; yet they have not an honestly gotten sovereign in their bank! Will the Lord be pleased with this defence of the supernatural? It is an aggravation of the original blasphemy. If men would say nothing about religion, and be sheer, pure, simple, out-and-out devils, one might have some hope of them. It is this church-going coupled with church-murder that makes the case hopeless. What a searching religion! Suppose it, dream it,—the religion takes up the ephah, the measure, and says, Is this right? And the man says, What have you to do with the ephah? Cross-examine me in the catechism; ask me questions out of the Old Testament; inquire into my acquisitions in the New Testament; interrogate me about the Epistles of Paul: and the Spirit of God says, Not until you have made this ephah right; you have nothing to do with Paul or his epistles, or theological profession, or Christian nomenclature, until you have made the measure right. What wonder that many men should find in correct doctrinal orthodoxy all they want? One of two things is clear: either they are right and the Bible is wrong, or the Bible is right and they are wrong; they cannot both be right.

The prophet goes into detail, saying,—

“Shall I [that is, the prophet himself] count them pure with the wicked balances, and with the bag of deceitful weights?” (ver. 11).

He was tempted to connive at this whole deception. It would have been an easier life if Micah could have said, Brethren, I am sent to assert certain great metaphysical propositions; as to what you are doing with your weights and measures I know nothing, and really I am not called upon to know anything—do you believe in the supernatural? Certainly! Can a man believe in the supernatural, and have a bag of false weights in the house? He cannot. That would indeed be a supreme genius that could be familiar with God, and able to vindicate and defend the mysteries of the Trinity, and yet be using false weights and scales all day long. That never was allowed in the

Bible. And this element of morality never can be revised out of the holy Book. And you can never have any family prayer in your house until you make the measure right, and the weight right, and the scale right. You may have to cut down the returns very much—let it be so; the moment you have cut them down there will be a highway opened between your soul and heaven, and you can pray all day without feeling the tedium of the homage. No minister dare speak about false weights if he has any regard to his living. There is not a man in any congregation that would not resent a criticism upon the weight or the balance or the ephah, and leave the ministry because it was too personal. If such men are taking the most comfortable road down to darkness, the road will be short, the darkness will be everlasting. Why do not men receive a book that is so pure in its morality, so righteous in its demands; a book that speaks for the dumb, and sees for the blind, and goes before the traveller to make the way open and easy? Take out of our literature the Bible, and you have not only taken out the most mysterious book, but the most moral book, the book of conduct, the book that purifies every relation of life; it nails every bad coin to the world's counter, and calls every man, whatever his ornamental titles may be, by his right definition and name. Honour the Bible, read it aloud; it will disinfect the perdition of society.

“For the rich men thereof are full of violence, and the inhabitants thereof have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth” (ver. 12).

Yet there are poor men who are so misled as to wonder if the Bible is inspired. Against whom is the charge made? “Rich men.” Why is it laid against them with so much emphasis? Because they might have been so much better. A man who is rich can have education, intelligence, pictures, music, books in the house; he can sit in comfort, and read the finest literature of the age; his opportunities are so many, his advantages are so vast; he has a garden in which he can walk, a library in which he can read, a gallery of pictures in which he can feed the hunger of his eyes. For him to have mean thoughts and low purposes, for him to be bad, is to be bad

with infinite aggravation of the original offence. It is difficult for a rich man not to be violent. We are soon swollen with pride. We begin to think that money answereth all things, and men who dare not whimper under other circumstances, yet talk blatantly under the inspiration of their wealth. Wealth will have its own way—wealth can pay for it; wealth need not consider the rights of other people; wealth can be violent when its own things are in peril. This is the natural tendency of wealth. How hardly, with what infinite strain and difficulty, shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of heaven! Riches are liars; riches are deceivers evermore. The Apostle Paul speaks of “the deceitfulness of riches.” On the other hand, it is possible to have millions, and to be simple, modest, generous, true, magnanimous. There are men who stand upon their property. The Lord bless such men, for the more they have the more the poor will have, the more every good institution will have; they do not carry their property as a burden, they stand upon it in sign of sovereignty.

There is something worse than violence in the charge—“their tongue is deceitful in their mouth.” There is hope of a violent man, because he will shout himself into sanity; when the fury has passed, he will apologise. Do not interrupt his volcanic folly; let all the lava come out, only you stand out of the way of it. Admire it, wonder about it, look on with attention, and when it is done the volcano will say, Now if you like you can sow me with a garden, build a little cottage on my side, all the lava has gone. But who can tell where a deceitful man begins and ends? He can shake hands with you, and have a grudge against you in his heart; he can meet you as if nothing was the matter, and yet far away back in his soul there is a complaint, a reproach, a bitterness, not to be removed. Can such a man be a Christian? No. No man who has a grudge in his heart can be a Christian. But he may believe in the supernatural, and have quite a bitter feeling against the Unitarians. Possibly, but he knows nothing about the Cross, the agony of Christ.

Who are we that we should have grudges against one another? Poor fools that cannot see over to-night into to-

morrow. Who are we that we should play Sir Infallible, and I am the offended man? Indeed! It would do thee good to be cut right in two, so that thy one half could not find the other for a day. If you like to have a grudge, have it, but do not imagine that in your heart you can find guest room for the grudge and for the Cross. Beware of deceit. It broods, it muses, it occupies its nightly sleeplessness in turning one fold more over, and doubling the matter still more thickly; it dreams itself into some new, perforce quiet villainy. The Lord searches the heart, and banishes deceit; he will have frankness, whiteness, purity, simplicity. A Bible that insists upon this quality and degree of conduct was never written by human hand; the hand was but the clerk, the writer was the eternal God.

What is the upshot? "Therefore." We were sure to come upon that word sooner or later. That is God's grand connective word:—"Therefore also will I make thee sick in smiting thee." What is the meaning of this sentence? The allusion is to the fact that the oppressors had made other people heart-sick. The poor had come to them and been repulsed; the poor had sought a proper measure, and had been treated to measure that was short; cases of charity and righteousness had been submitted, and had been treated with contempt, and men turned away heart-sore and heart-sick. You can only understand some diseases by having them. There are some persons who cannot understand that you may have some complaint which they never had; they think it is affectation: but if you happen to have just the complaint they have they are not without a certain measure of sympathy. Here are men who made others sick made sick themselves. "As I have done unto others, so hath the Lord requited me": I put out the poor man's fire, and now, though my cellar be full of coals, I cannot open the door, and I who have a colliery at my disposal shiver with cold.

A curious kind of punishment is mentioned in detail,—

"Thou shalt eat, but not be satisfied" [We are very learned about diabetes—here it is: eating all day long, and the eating ending in nothing. If a man have diabetes he sends for the physician; but what about his diabetes of the soul?]; "and thy casting down shall be in the midst of thee" [there shall be a wolf called hunger in the kennel of thy heart];

"and thou shalt take hold" [of thine own property, and cannot claim it or carry it], "but shalt not deliver; and that which thou deliverest" [by thy skill as huntsman] "will I give up to the sword. Thou shalt sow, but thou shalt not reap; thou shalt tread the olives,* but thou shalt not anoint thee with oil; and sweet wine, but shalt not drink wine" [everything going to waste in life] (vers. 14, 15).

Mark the vexation of it—sowing, and not reaping; sowing, and somebody else reaping. Here is the uncontrollable element in life. A man says, I certainly did tread out the olives, and I have not a small vessel full of oil with which to anoint myself: working for others, the slave of slaves. We see this every day. We need not invoke the supernatural in any merely metaphysical sense in order to substantiate this as a fact; it is the common experience of life. Men put money into bags, and go for the money, and it is not there. Why is it not there? The prophet explains that there were holes in the bag, and the money went right through. You have heard of a man all day long trying to draw water out of a well with a sieve. How industrious he is! See, the sieve goes down, the wheel is turned, and the sieve is brought up, and there is no water in it. It is a mystery. Not at all. Why is there no water? Because the vessel is a sieve; the water runs out as quickly as it runs in. You have heard of one who was rolling a stone up the hill all day, and the more it was rolled up the more

* "The style of Micah has been compared with that of Hosea and Isaiah. The similarity of their subject may account for many resemblances in language with the latter prophet, which were almost unavoidable (comp. Mic. i. 2 with Isa. i. 2; Mic. ii. 2 with Isa. v. 8; Mic. ii. 6, 11 with Isa. xxx. 10; Mic. ii. 12 with Isa. x. 20-22; Mic. vi. 6-8 with Isa. i. 11-17). The diction of Micah is vigorous and forcible, sometimes obscure from the abruptness of its transitions, but varied and rich in figures derived from the pastoral (i. 8; ii. 12; v. 4, 5, 7, 8; vii. 14) and rural life of the lowland country (i. 6; iii. 12; iv. 3, 12, 13; vi. 15), whose vines and olives and fig-trees were celebrated (1 Chron. xxvii. 27, 28), and supply the prophet with so many striking allusions (i. 6; iv. 3, 4; vi. 15; vii. 1, 4) as to suggest that, like Amos, he may have been either a herdsman or a vine-dresser, who had heard the howling of the jackals (i. 8, A.V. 'dragons') as he watched his flocks or his vines by night, and had seen the lions slaughtering the sheep (v. 8). One peculiarity which he has in common with Isaiah is the frequent use of paronomasia; in i. 10-15 there is a succession of instances of this figure in the plays upon words suggested by the various places enumerated (comp. also ii. 4), which it is impossible to transfer to English, though Ewald has attempted to render them into German."—SMITH'S *Dictionary of the Bible*.

it rolled down, and at night it was exactly where it was before the process of rolling began. Worthless labour, useless labour, vexatious labour. Thus doth God puzzle and bewilder and perplex men. Now, they say, it is done. Where is it? Gone! Do not suppose that wrong can ever come right; do not imagine that God can ever be outwitted. Come into the harmonic relation of things. Do not start some little solar system of your own. Why should you play the fool too much? You can do nothing. All the divine government is fixed, and is moving on to its purpose, and you can do nothing to hinder it; it will just roll over your poor bones, and there shall not be one speck of powder left. It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. It is an awful situation, indeed, to be always going against gravitation. And what a fool is he who says, I will make a little earth of my own, and I will light it by a principle which I have invented and patented, and I will set up an independent empire. The only answer to that man is, Do it. By no means reason with him. A man who can make the proposition is not below reason or above reason—he is simply not in reason at all. Tell him to do it, and when he has done it to send for you, and you will look at it. No. There is a scheme of things, a grand sphere, with a wondrous globe symbolising completeness and symbolising motion. Globes were not made to stand still; squares may try to rest on one side, but globes have nothing to rest on, they were meant to whirl and curve. A globe flies; it is a mystery of wings, and the Lord hath set all things in circles. He knows nothing about our straight lines, and our detailed and intermediate geometry, in which we please ourselves with divers figures. He knows the circuit, the sum and mystery of things, and if we will not enter into his circular motion, his wonderful scheme of sun within sun, constellation within constellation, and system within system, we shall be dropped out. And where, where shall we drop to?

Chapter vii.

A STANDARD OF MORALITY.

THIS is Micah when he has lost his mantle. This is not the Micah we have been accustomed to hear. A man is not always his best self. Do not find a man in a period of gloom, and represent his depression as being the real character and quality of his soul. Micah has been working hard ; he is undergoing the misery of reaction. Micah came forth from the village thinking he would convert the whole kingdom, north and south ; that men had only to hear his ringing and dominant voice, and they would instantaneously begin to weep and pray and repent. It is the old routine. Bless God for young enthusiasm. It dashes forth into the fray, saying, I have only got to show this banner, and that battlefield will become a church. We could not do without such high rapture and chivalrous passion. We know the end of it all. But he would be a cruel man who would discourage young devotion. Micah the villager begins to feel that he has been toiling all day, and has taken nothing. This is personal disappointment. The moment we cut our relation with the Infinite we are shorn Samsons. Micah hand-in-hand with God makes the kingdom reel again under the volley of his thundering ; but when Micah withdraws his hands, and becomes a simple unit, he wraps his head with the mantle of midnight, and groans and complains, and says he has wasted his strength for nought. But that could not be. No man ever wastes his strength who gives it to God. "In all labour there is profit." The young scribe is nearer being a good writer for the last attempt he made, though his friends smile at the rude caligraphy ; the musician is nearer being master of his vocation through the last song he sung as the result of industry, though he was wrong in every note. "In all labour there is profit,"—not always palpable, and estimable in figures ; but there is some increase in the quality of the mind, some cunning added

to the craft and skill of the fingers. So Micah should not have complained with so utter a depression. He has added something to the store of the world's best riches. Every life well lived makes its addition to the sum-total. The world would not have been so rich had you, poorest mother of the race, never lived. You exclaim, What have I done? You cannot tell what you have done; it is no business of yours to make up the account. There is a registrar; running night and day through the ages, there is a recording pen: you will have the issue in the future. We are so impatient that we want to see results now. When did you sow the seed? Yesterday. When did you look for the harvest? This morning. This is impatience; this is ignorance; this is want of that restfulness which comes of deep practical learning in the school of experience.

Let us hear Micah, and, listening, we shall discover a tone that has come down to the present moment,—

"The good man is perished out of the earth: and there is none upright among men: they all lie in wait for blood; they hunt every man his brother with a net" (ver. 2).

When we ourselves are down it is hard to believe that anybody else is up; when our prayer is choked in our throat it is easy to believe that God hears no prayer at all, nor cares for petitioning and supplicating man. We interpret all things by ourselves. There is a curious self-projection of the soul upon the disc of history, and we read according to the shadow which we throw upon that disc. This is what we call pessimism. We are always inventing strange words, and imagining that thereby we are making some kind of progress. Man has a fatal gift of giving names to things, and once give a name, and it will be almost impossible to obliterate it. We call this pessimism,—that is, seeing all the wickedness and none of the goodness; seeing all the darkness and none of the light; seeing the utter desolation of all things, and not seeing in all the wilderness one green blade, one tiny flower, or hearing in the grim silence one trill of lark or soft note of thrush or nightingale. There are persons gifted with the genius of darkness. It may do us good to visit them occasionally; but on the whole it is better to live in the sunshine, and to

hear the music, and to come under the influence of intelligent vivacity and cheerfulness. If people will shut themselves up in their own little houses—for the biggest house is little, the palace is a mere hut—and never keep any company but their own, they will go down. It is so ecclesiastically. There are persons who never see the universe except through their own church window, and as no window is as big as the horizon, there steals insidiously upon the mind a disposition to deny the existence of the horizon itself. It is so with reading. There are those who read only a certain set of books. They go down; there is no mental range, no scope, no variety, no mystery of colour, no hopefulness, no imagination. The very earth needs to have its crops changed. If you will go on growing the same crops you will cease to have any crop to grow that is worth gathering. There is, on the other hand, what is termed optimism. That is the exact contrary of pessimism. Optimism sees the best of everything. There is a danger along that line also; the danger is that we may not be stern enough, real enough, penetrating enough, going into the heart and inmost fibre of things to find out reality and truth, how bad or good soever the case may be. A most mischievous talent is this of giving names. You cannot now introduce an idea but some pedant will say, That is Buddhism. Well, suppose it is Buddhism, where is the crime? If you introduce another proposition there will be those who will tell you that it is a Greek thought. Well, suppose it is a Greek thought, may it not have modern applications, new meanings, fresh aspects? May it not be utilised in the civilisation of to-day? Propound some doctrine that is apparently novel, and there will be those who will fasten upon it a term—as if the term were an argument. Do not be afraid of such men. Polysyllables never broke any bones. Have you the truth? Then utter it. Do you believe you have it? Make it known, submit it for discussion; and be sure that if you see no blue sky above you, your eye is wrong, not the sky. The good man is not perished out of the earth. This is reaction. Elijah thought the same thing, and the Lord told him there were seven thousand men in the world better than ever he was perhaps; at all events they were faithful, loyal, constant hearts. But do not believe that the prophet is literally signifying the absolute non-existence of good men. You must read the Bible imaginatively

as well as grammatically ; and you must hear all your friends through the medium of your imagination as well as through the medium of the dictionary and the grammar, or your friendship will soon come to nothing. There are those who can be measured by dictionary and grammar, because they never say anything with any colour in it, any vitality, any possibility of expansion ; by all means give them the largest lexicographical hospitality you can, and let them be interpreted through the medium of the alphabet. But there are other men who, when they say, "The good man is perished out of the earth," do not mean it in the literal definite sense which the literalist would attach to the term. They simply feel that a process of decay has set in, that things are not so far on as they ought to be, and that the old mystery and glow of prayer are not so predominant and visible as in the former days. Thus read the prophets, and you will find that in them there is that central average truth which looks all ways, and takes in all passing time, and all days and ages to come.

Then we err so much in having a false standard of the good man, and the progress of society, and the results of earnest work. Thus the Lord sends upon us the punishment of perplexity, because he is growing plants we do not know the names or the uses of, and he is continually rebuking our faithlessness by new miracles of production. The Lord will not let us hold the reins. Sometimes he permits us to sit on the front seat as if we were actually taking part in the administration of the chariot. There is but one Lord, one Captain, one Sovereign, one Ruler,—great, gracious, wise, tender, sympathetic, pitiful, and redeeming ; and thou, poor man, seated on the box-seat, and imagining thyself of consequence to the chariot, take care that thou do not fall off, and be crushed under the wheels thou didst falsely imagine to be under thine own direction. We are sailing in God's ship, we are being driven in God's chariot, we are part and parcel of a great system of economics we cannot understand, and wise is he up to the point of rest who says, Let the Lord have his own way : the darkness and the light are both alike to him ; he made every road he drives upon ; he made every sea he sails over, he first created the tempest, and he holds the whirlwinds in his fist. Fretful, meddlesome, selfish, vain, eccentric man would like to sit

upon the throne, if only for one moment, but in that one moment God knows he would wreck eternity.

Micah says, that in his day they were doing evil "with both hands earnestly." A better word is "well," and a better word is perhaps "skilful"; but we see the paradox more clearly by putting in the word "well," then we read, "That they may do evil with both hands well." There is no contradiction of terms. There are men who make a study of doing things that are wrong, skilfully, cunningly, well. There are thieves who are discovered, and there are thieves who are not discovered, because they steal so well, so skilfully; they shake hands with the man they have robbed, and say Good-night to the soul they have plundered. Men may become experts in the devil's academy. The cleverness does not excuse the iniquity; the ability does not restore the character. If that ability had been devoted otherwise, what fortunes lay within its grasp, what influence belonged of right to its mastery! But men love to work in the dark, they seem to be more at home there than in the sunlight; they have a gift of sight which enables them to see all their spectral comrades in the black darkness of night. How was it in the time of Micah? Once more he falls back on the prince and the judge and the great man. Not a word does he say about the poor, the oppressed, and the despised; he says, The wickedness of my age I trace to the prince and the judge and the great men—to the men who have been to school and to college and university; certificated men, gold-medalists—men who have had every advantage that society and civilisation can give them. We are so busy in looking after the small fry. Here we have seized upon a little boy who has stolen a pocket-handkerchief, and we say, We have got him now! And the man who took him up—what may we say of him? And the judge who sentenced him, the grey-haired judge, the judge with the ploughed cheeks, the wrinkled forehead, the judge with solemn voice, the voice of doom? Open your hand, judge! What is there in it?

Micah said they did things so well in his day, so cleverly, that "they wrap it up." They made an intricacy of it. The man who was not in the ring did not understand what was going on; they had a system that they called a *quid pro quo*—(men do many

things under dog Latin they would not do in plain English)—they understood one another. Nothing was said; the reporter looked up for the purpose of catching the incriminating sentence, and the men said nothing; the prince nodded to the judge, and the judge made a sign to the great man, and so they wrap it up. But there it is, and it will be opened out, and it will be read, and every signature will be attested, and every writer will be called for to say whether he wrote it, how much he wrote, why he wrote it: they shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. This is a terror; but on the other hand this is a joy, for righteousness then shall shine forth as the morning and judgment as the noonday, and misrepresented and misunderstood men will have all the advantage of morning light.

Micah continues his threnody,—

“The best of them is as a briar: the most upright is sharper than a thorn hedge” (ver. 4).

This is pessimism in all the completeness of its depression. The best is bad; the most upright, the picked men of society, are all thorns. Take care how you try to get through a thorn hedge; the scratches may identify you, the wounds may be witnesses against you in the day of visitation. This is what society comes to without God. Lose the religious element, and society falls to pieces. Society thinks not; for a time society thinks it can keep itself very well together, but experience shows that when the *morale* of society goes down, its money securities are waste paper. The reputation of a country is in its morality, and morality properly interpreted is the active or practical side of true spiritual religion. Morality may be derived from a word which signifies mere manner, attitude, posture, and the like; but not from this contemptible *mos* is morality truly derived, but from the very Spirit of God, and the very genius of the Cross. No morality can be trusted in the dark that is not metaphysical, spiritual, divine.

The Lord would send upon the people who acted criminally what is called “perplexity.” The word “perplexity” has a singular meaning. Herod was “perplexed.” He saw things in crosslights; all the roads came together, and he could not tell which one to

take ; it was not a question of two roads, but a question of five roads, bisecting and intersecting, and leaving the mind in a state of whirl and puzzle. That is perplexity. The Lord will send upon people who disbelieve him and disobey him the spirit of perplexity ; they shall not know one another. Perplexity shall enter into the very use of words ; terms shall lose their natural application. Man shall say to man, What sayest thou ? And man shall reply to man, Fool, hearest thou not what I say in thy mother tongue ? And thus the fray shall increase until it become fury and craziness and disintegration of social bond and trust. The Lord hath many ways of judgment ; in heaven there are many bolts of fire ; we cannot tell when one will fall, or how it will come. In such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh : what I say unto one I say unto all, Watch. The Lord goeth forth at all hours—at midnight, at the crowing of the cock, at the early dawn, in the mid-day sun, and in the evening twilight ; none can tell when he will open the door and step forth in majesty and rigour, and in the spirit of judgment. Thus we are trained, thus we are kept on the alert ; we have no notice ; our breath is in our nostrils, and we may die now : there is but a step between thee and death. The broadest, most herculean man always walks by the side of his own tomb—a false step, and he is in. Be sober, be vigilant ; walk as children of the light.

What is to guarantee society against this apostasy and this infamous declension in all high and sacred energies ? There is only one guarantee, and that is the indwelling and perfect sovereignty of God the Holy Ghost. Do not try to evade the term, or to make a mystery of it ; there is mystery enough in it, but there is more in it than mystery—a simple, solemn, profound fact. We cannot keep ourselves ; our lamps are only of a certain little size, and our oil is but a spoonful, and there is no independence in man ; we live and move, and have our being in God. No man can go to the fountain once for all and take out water enough to keep his life going evermore. He may take his vessel full of water, and may quench his thirst for the moment, but he must keep the way to the fountain always open ; never shut up the road : you are full and you abound for the present, but the time of necessity and of pain will inevitably recur. Here is the glory of Christianity :

it provides for all time and for all need ; it is the salt of the earth, it is the light of the world, it is the disinfectant of all pestilential atmosphere. Do not make an argument of it, but submit it to practical test. Why should you make an argument of the ship when you want to go across the ocean, and the ship is ready to receive you into its hospitality ? If you make an argument of it you will never risk the deep, and cross the ocean and touch the farther shore. There are questions which Christianity invites you to ask ; there are inquiries which it is eager to consider and discuss with you, and so long as you keep within the lines of intelligence and reason and fair inquiry, you are entitled to push your interrogations ; but when you begin to wriggle, and confuse yourselves, and use words that have more meanings in them than you have ever grasped, you are allowing the time to escape, and presently the ship will weigh anchor and be off, and you will be left behind. If society with a Christian element in it has come down to a state that may be described as unrighteous and unworthy, it is not because of the Christianity that was in it, but because the Christianity was misunderstood, or ignored, or misapplied. Do not blame Christianity because Christian countries are among the worst in the world. They are only amongst the worst because they are amongst the best. That is not paradoxical ; it is practical, simple, and literal. This colour that you hold in your hand may appear to be very white, but if you take in the other hand a real white, as pure as it can be obtained under our conditions, and bring the two together, you will then see that what you thought was white falls far short of the standard. And so there are many countries that are thought to be very good, very excellent—really countries that might be lived in ; but try them by comparison with Christian countries, even Christian countries of an inferior grade, and there will come a time when you will say, After all there is something in Christianity that is not to be found out of it ; there is a standard of morality peculiar to itself ; in it there is a unique righteousness. There may be a world of hypocrisy, but the hypocrisy would have been impossible but for the very glory of the thing that is simulated. Go forth into society, and take its best aspect. Do not believe yourselves when you are all moaning and complaining and reproaching. You are not yourselves ; for the moment you are

beside yourselves, and know not the real reason and progress of things. The progress of society is guaranteed by the existence of God. It is not guaranteed by the existence of your pulpit and your institutions and your literature and your fretful impetuosity : the progress of society is guaranteed by the Spirit of God, and heaven is guaranteed not because of your worth, but because of God's purpose. God cannot be turned aside, his word cannot fail ; the word of the Lord abideth for ever, and though it be oftentimes night and storm and cloud and strenuous battle, yet through it all there goes the soul of eternity, the spirit of the Cross, the purpose of God, and in the wilderness we shall find garden, and in stony places we shall find habitations of comfort. This is not the voice of human poetry. The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

NOTE.

"In the last section (vi., vii.) Jehovah, by a bold poetical figure, is represented as holding a controversy with his people, pleading with them in justification of his conduct towards them and the reasonableness of his requirements. The dialogue form in which chap. vi. is cast renders the picture very dramatic and striking. In vi. 3-5 Jehovah speaks ; the inquiry of the people follows in ver. 6, indicating their entire ignorance of what was required of them ; their inquiry is met by the almost impatient rejoinder, ' Will Jehovah be pleased with thousands of rams, with myriads of torrents of oil ? ' The still greater sacrifice suggested by the people, ' Shall I give my firstborn for my transgressions ? ' calls forth the definition of their true duty, ' to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with their God.' How far they had fallen short of this requirement is shown in what follows (9-12), and judgment is pronounced upon them (13-16). The prophet acknowledges and bewails the justice of the sentence (vii. 1-6) ; the people in repentance patiently look to God, confident that their prayer will be heard (7-10), and are reassured by the promise of deliverance announced as following their punishment (11-13) by the prophet, who in his turn presents his petition to Jehovah for the restoration of his people (14, 15). The whole concludes with a triumphal song of joy at the great deliverance, like that from Egypt, which Jehovah will achieve, and a full acknowledgment of his mercy and faithfulness to his promises (16-20). The last verse is reproduced in the song of Zacharias (Luke i. 72, 73)."—SMITH'S *Dictionary of the Bible*

NAHUM

(B.C. 720-698).

[NOTE.—“The Book of Nahum is a striking illustration of the moral use of prophecy, of its fitness to console (so the *name* of the prophet implies) the believer, and strengthen him for present duties. Of Nahum himself, nothing is known, except that he belonged to Elkosh, a place now unrecognised, but which Jerome (who lived a thousand years afterwards) asserts to have belonged to Galilee. He probably prophesied in Judah, after the ten tribes had been carried captive, and between the two invasions of Sennacherib. At this period of perplexity, when the overthrow of Samaria must have suggested to Judah many fears for her own safety, when Jerusalem had been drained of its treasure by Hezekiah, in the vain hope of turning away the fury of Sennacherib, and when distant rumours of the conquest of part of Egypt added still more to the general dismay, the prophet is raised up to reveal the power and tenderness of Jehovah (i. 1-8), to foretell the subversion of the Assyrian empire (i. 9-12), the death of Sennacherib, and the deliverance of Hezekiah (i. 13-15). The destruction of Nineveh is then predicted in the most glowing colours, and with singular minuteness; and profane history tells us that these predictions have been literally fulfilled.”—ANGUS’S *Bible Handbook*.]

THE BURDEN OF NINEVEH.

THERE is a sense in which every prophet must make a burden of his work. If he himself had to do it all it would be nothing but burden. Instead of idealising the word, making it poetical, bringing up before the eye of the mind some stalwart pilgrim carrying his easy load upon his shoulder, think of it as a man whose heart is sore because of the wickedness of the people, whose sleep is taken away from him because night is turned into a day of wickedness and wrath. Think of a man who has more to say than he can utter, whose tongue cannot keep pace with his heart because his heart is full of the thunder and lightning of judgment, and full of the music and pathos of gospel, and would utter itself incoherently, paradoxically, so that men not versed in this species of eloquence would say, What doth this babbler

exclaim ? for now he thunders, and now he whispers, and now he storms like a whirlwind, and now he cries like a broken-hearted mother. What would he be at ? Yet through all this whirl and tumult and conflict must men come before they can understand what the old prophets had to do in the name and strength of God.

Nahum writes a book. It was a curious thing to do in those days. It was a book of a vision, and therefore likely to be quite misunderstood ; for who has eyes that can see visions of the shadowy ærial kind ? Who but Moses could have seen the cloud, histrionically treated, shaped into tabernacle and sanctuary and coming temple, as the Lord took handfuls of cloud and scattered them about in apocalyptic vision, so that the meek heart could see the new architecture ? Only a visionist can read visions. There are some men who ought never to attempt to read poetry, because they kill it. They do not know that they are killing it, but their slaughter is none the less complete. There are persons who ought not to read the lighter kinds of literature, say even comedy itself, because they were born to live at the graveside, and never have caught a laugh on the wing. Only those who have the inspired heart can read the prophets, either major or minor, and understand what they are about,—not understand what they are merely saying, but understand what they are meaning. There is a common drift in all the prophecies, a set, a tendency in this great biblical movement. Unless you comprehend that tendency or movement you will be lost in the details of the dislocated parts. The Bible reveals God : now let all the rest fall into proper adjustment under the influence of that dominant and ennobling thought. How will Nahum talk about God ? He will talk about God in his own way. If every man would do that we should have a new and grand theology, because we should have as many theologies as there are human beings reverently engaged in the profound study of God. Every man sees his own aspect of the divine Being ; every man catches his own particular view of the Cross : hence a good deal of the obstinacy that is found in theological controversy and religious disputation. A man cannot depersonalise himself, nor need he ; what he wants to do is to understand that every other man is also a student of the same mystery, and is also blessed with some portion of the Spirit

without whom there is no life, without whom there can be no music in the soul. Hear Nahum :—

“God is jealous, and the Lord revengeth; the Lord revengeth, and is furious; the Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies” (ver. 2).

That was true for the day. The prophecies of Nahum, however, do not consist of one verse. The prophet will see another aspect presently, but he was true to the revelation as it passed before him. It is poor preaching that harps upon the words, “God is love”; because it does not take in the whole aspect of a manifold revelation. Yet it does take in every aspect if we understood the meaning of the word “God,” and the meaning of the word “love.” Love is not softness, moral indifference, spiritual turpitude, a sentiment that buys itself off from service by offering copious tears; love is law, love is righteousness, love is anger. Love can be hot as unquenchable fire. Our God is a consuming fire: God is love. Here is a man who says, “God is jealous”; so he was at that moment. “The Lord revengeth”; so he was doing when Nahum wrote. We want the real experience of men: What do you see of God? How does the vision appear to you? Put it all down, day by day, for the bread of the soul, as well as the bread of the body, is a daily donation of God. You need not struggle to reconcile yesterday with to-day: the harmony of things does not lie under your fingers; it is no trick wrought out by the cunning of man’s hand: the solidarity, the unity, the music of the whole must be left to the sovereignty of the sovereign God. You will not be out of harmony with your age if you write in your book: God burns; God is an unquenchable fire; God scorches men. Put it down; to-morrow you shall write otherwise.

Nahum did; said he: “The Lord is slow to anger.” What, the same God that in the second verse was jealous, furious, revenging, reserving wrath for his enemies? Yes. Herein is the mystery of the total personality. “The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked.” He does not drop into mere sentiment. Nahum carries his law with him. Even when he says God is slow to anger he admits the anger, and the slowness to it may be its assurance and its completeness in the latter end. There are those who speak much of the God

of nature. There are now persons who are nature worshippers. They generally confine their services to a particular condition of the atmosphere. Their worship is climatic and barometric. They are great on sunny Sabbath mornings. When the churchgoer meets them and says, "Where have you been this morning?" they say, "In the temple of nature, hearing the lark or the thrush; watching the bees or the butterflies; inhaling the soft health-laden breeze. A beautiful church is nature." All that is mere sound, not worth the name of fury, yet joining the poet again when he says, "Like an idiot's tale." There is no such God of nature. The God of nature—he is described by the prophet Nahum just as he is:—

"The Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebuketh the sea, and maketh it dry, and drieth up all the rivers: Bashan languisheth, and Carmel, and the flower of Lebanon languisheth. The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein" (vers. 3-5).

That is the God of nature. Where are his worshippers now? Do you find them standing on the mountain-top, drenched with rain, worshipping in the beautiful temple of Nature? Never. By arrangement and of set purpose they may have been caught in a tempest, but they never braved it in order to worship the God of nature. They love to hear morning worship the lark; evening worship the nightingale; delightful service the south-blowing breeze, the fragrant air. Away with such mockery if you call that the God of nature! He is God of nature also when he thunders and lightens, and shakes the mountains and melts the rocks. Where are you, then, you lovers of the lark, and devotees of the nightingale, where are you then? You speak of the God of nature as if he were the leading florist of the universe, as if he were the chief gardener who had laid out all his walls and terraces and parterres for your benefit. The God of nature can be as furious as the God of the Church, or the God of the inner and spiritual temple. The Lord writes his whole signature upon the volume of nature. On that volume he has written: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Our God is a consuming fire: the volcano is the inkhorn in which he dips his pen that he may write his fury,

his grandeur, and his sensitive majesty. We hold that the God of nature is the God of the Bible, and that the God of nature properly and fully interpreted is just as many-sided as is the God of revelation; and we protest against the squashy, useless, pithless sentimentality that goes out on Sunday morning because the lark is singing, and because the wind is in the south. That is the God of one side of nature; but the God of nature is as complex as is the God of Nahum, set forth in the second and third and following verses of his prophecy.

“Who can stand before his indignation?” One might imagine that all this is found only in the Church; this is the ideal or poetic view of God; this is theology in blank verse; this is the dream of a village mind; the high uplifting of one who has been caught suddenly in a divine afflatus, and who speaks that which he does not understand. Yet all that is in the Bible is written in nature, in germ, in hint, in outline, in dim symbol, if we had the eye that could read such typology. And do those who attend what is specifically called the Church care nothing for nature? Contrariwise, they love it; it is the Christian poet that has made the flower blush with subtlest, and just flattery; it is the Christian astronomer that has made night blush by praising her reverently to her face. The Christian will find flowers where atheism cannot find them. Christian prophecy has the faculty of causing stones to rise up as children unto Abraham; Christian interpretation does not read things into divine providence, but reads them out of it, saying always, We have not got the whole secret of this root, there is more beauty in it, and with more sunshine we shall get it all. History is the root out of which God grows flowers and wheat, great trees and flowerets that little children may gather with their tiny hands. We protest against the division of the God of nature and the God of grace, the God of nature and the God of revelation, as if only atheists or agnostics had to do with the God of nature, whilst Christians were worshipping some totally distinct being. Christians claim both. Nature and revelation are God in two volumes. Is he a wise reader who, having been entranced in the first volume of the drama, simply declines to read the second? What shall we say of his entrancement when he flushes with the purple of wonder,

and expands under the enthusiasm of delighted gratitude, because he has read the first volume, but says he will have nothing to do with the volume that succeeds it? Such indifference to the succeeding volume throws suspicion upon the reality of his admiration when he offers that mockery to volume one. In Nahum you find the God of the book and the God of nature, the God of moral attributes and the God of majestic revelation, in the forms, the palpitations, and the changing colours of this dissolving scene.

Nahum is strong in contrasts. Hear him: "The Lord is good"—what! the Lord who is jealous?—"a stronghold in the day of trouble"—what! the God who is "furious"?—Yes. Now the contrast: "But with an overrunning flood he will make an utter end of the place thereof, and darkness shall pursue his enemies." Then it is a division of character. "He knoweth them that trust in him"; that is character: "and darkness shall pursue his enemies"; that is character. It is character that is elected, predestinated; it is character that is doomed from all eternity. It is one of two things: a savour of life unto life, or a savour of death unto death; a trusting soul, or a hostile spirit. In the one case the Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble when nobody else wants you; in the other it is night sevenfold, following like an infinite beast of prey, the enemy of righteousness and light, truth and love. We have advanced nothing beyond this position taken up by the prophet. The God of the New Testament is as jealous as the God of the Old Testament, and the God revealed by our blessed and only Saviour Christ Jesus is as loving in the Old Testament as in the New. Hebrew seems better made for expressing tenderness than Greek; Hebrew can fondle the reader, embrace him; Hebrew can whisper better than Greek can. Greek has its own music, but not that rich, round, deep, mellow music that follows the soul through the darkness, yea, through the valley of the shadow of death:—"Like as a father pitieth"; "The Lord is my shepherd"; "The Lord is very pitiful": these are Hebrew whispers, and there is nothing in New Testament music other than in quality. The New Testament has its own accent and individualism, but the New Testament represents the same God

as the Old Testament; Nahum and Paul discourse concerning the same attributes. If any man therefore shall be in the seventh verse of Nahum he will be saying, The Lord is good; I know it; he has dried my tears, he has directed my steps, he has held me up in all my goings; though I have fallen I have not been utterly cast down. He is a stronghold in the day of trouble; when my nearest, dearest friend did not know me the Lord received me, and when my father and my mother forsook me, then the Lord took me up, and I have had a habitation in his pavilion all my life. If another man should be in the eighth verse he will discourse of the same God in other terms, calling him an overrunning flood, calling him an infinite aggregation of darkness. The explanation will not be found in the variety of poetic conception, but in the consistence of spiritual character. God is to us what we are to God; to the froward he will show himself froward; to the humble he will come with that sweeping condescension as graceful as it is noiseless, an insinuation not a patronage.

Then Nahum will not let the enemy alone. He says: "For while they be folden together as thorns . . . they shall be devoured as stubble fully dry." Here he is referring to the intricacies of sin,—“folden together as thorns,” so interwrapped and interinvolved that it is simply impossible to perform the task of unravelment. Will the Lord pick with patient fingers all the intertwinings of these intricate perplexities? No. What will he do with them? Burn them! We had not thought of that: we had looked at the intricacy, the difficulty, the manifold perplexity, and said, Surely God's own patience cannot overtake this task; we wondered how God would come out of a difficulty so obvious and so complete: we had forgotten the fire. There could be no universe without fire; there could be no life without fire. Blood is fire; life is fire—controlled, inspired, set to work by a sovereign agency. We had forgotten hell. It is a poor ministry that has no perdition in it. It may be a popular ministry. There have been persons who would not go to church because they would not hear the minister pronouncing the punishment or wrath of God against evil-doing. They would go to hear the lark. That lark will ruin them. They have got hold of the wrong meaning

of that bird's note. There is not a lark in the whole cage of the firmament that is not praising God. But some persons can only take one view of the singing bird. If that bird could break the harmonies of the universe, the universe would soon find a grave for it. Nothing that mars the music can live long; only that which swells the infinite cadence is permitted to enjoy immortality. You have laid cunning schemes; you have made the nights overlap one another; you have doubled back on your own journey so that the detective shall not pursue you; you have laid your plan so skilfully and subtly as to defy detection; you have made a mark here and left a signature there, and you have overturned all natural sequences, and so gone back upon yourself as to roll your life together into a perplexity. Now, say you, what will God do with me? Burn you! You had better know it. But there is one thing you can do which will prevent the burning; you can turn and live—"Turn ye, turn ye! Why will ye die?" It is not God burning as an act of vengeance; it is the universe taking up God's purpose and applying it, and that purpose is that all evil shall be burned. No house can do without its fire, and God's own voice cannot do without its flame—searching, penetrating, disinfecting, everlasting. This is right, this is loving. It is not love that permits the pestilence to wreak under the child's throat; it is not love that says, The miasma is rising thickly, and the dear child is in its chamber sleeping; open the window, let the miasma have full play. I love my child, and therefore I cannot interfere with the play and scope of this miasmatic vapour. Love says, Burn it, or the child may be killed.

Nahum represents what we have often forgotten, namely, that God controls and directs all history.

"And the Lord hath given a commandment concerning thee, that no more of thy name be sown: out of the house of thy gods will I cut off the graven image and the molten image: I will make thy grave; for thou art vile" (ver. 14).

That is how history is made. We wonder how certain houses have run to nothing. God did it. We have said, Where are the great and the mighty who ruled the civilisation of gone ages? The Lord said, "No more of thy name shall be sown": that seed

is done, the crop must be changed. It is thus that God keeps the fields of life going ; it is thus that God intermixes the growths of civilisation and progress, so that we belong to one another. The great man has a club foot. He did not want it. No : but that connects him with a certain part of his ancestry that he ought not to forget. The poor man is disabled and humiliated and racked with pain ; true : but in intervals he writes for immortality ; his thoughts are birds that sing for evermore. He did not want to have that ailing, aching, rheumatic, staggering frame ; but God reminds him that he is aristocratically descended by the mind. How often that lineage is forgotten ! Is a man descended from some duke who murdered men ? Then his remotest scion is supposed to be a gentleman. But is there no lineage coming down from Isaiah and Ezekiel, from the poets, the thinkers, the leaders of the world's highest thought ? On one side of your nature you are as plebeian as the clods you plough ; on the other, by your power of prayer you are taken into the masonry of the angels, by your gift of thought you have a chief seat in the assembly of the immortals, by a tender soothing sympathy you are invited to sit with Christ on his throne. There are two lineages : the lineage of the bones, which may come to much or nothing as the case may be ; and the lineage of the soul, aristocratic as God. We cannot be engrafted into the lower lineage, but, blessed be that Cross that makes Calvary the pivot of the universe, blessed be that Cross that makes heaven possible to the worst, each of us may be taken into the household of God, may be enfranchised in the Jerusalem that is above, may be set among the stars that shall go out no more for ever. To declare this is to preach the everlasting gospel.

Chapter iii.

THE USES OF HISTORY.

“Woe to the bloody city! it is all full of lies and robbery” (ver. 1).

THE city was Nineveh. The city is every city under the sun. There is something in the very word “city” suggestive of this kind of prosperity. It would seem as if city-building were a practical blasphemy. We cannot account for this, but the light of history seems to direct our attention in this unhappy direction. Nineveh had repented under the preaching of Jonah; Nineveh had forgotten her penitence and her prayers, and had gone back to riot and revel, idolatry, self-indulgence, and enervating luxury. She had thrown her arms around embodied evil, and loved it with all her wicked passion. Nahum succeeded Jonah, and he pronounces the fate of the backslider. He came from the village to rebuke the city; he brought the fresh air of the country with him, the mountain breeze, the village simplicity, the rustic frankness, sanctified and inspired by the Holy Ghost. Even a village is the germ of a city; but the village is better. There is less thickness of iniquity. Evil is still there; we cannot get rid of evil in time. Who can blot out the evil mark in so short a day as poor little empty time? The fate of backsliders is always the same. Backsliding hardens the heart of the apostate. He puts his fingers into his ears, and will not hear the voice of the divine judgment; he places his hands over his eyes when he does not want to see the light of holiness, and reasons within himself that because he has created the darkness God is purposely concealing his own righteousness. Wickedness is able, subtle, clever, sagacious, inventive. If there is any way into enjoyment wickedness will find it out; if there is any gate by which wickedness can escape final judgment, wickedness is quick enough to discover that way. But there is none. Though hand join in hand, though there be a plot, a conspiracy a confederacy of evil, it shall be burned like stubble.

Of Nineveh the prophet says, "It is a city of bloods": that is the literal translation of the words which Nahum used; a Hebraism, as of one blood upon another, great coatings of blood. Nineveh was painted in that vermilion. Everything Nineveh had was bought with blood; Nineveh was an *Aceldama*, a field of blood. Its prosperity was laid in blood. It had nothing that had not on it that red spot, that brand of condemnation. It is difficult to have a city built on any other foundation; such is the rush, the fury, the competition: such is the result of friction, collision, conflict, that man cuts the throat of man, and cuts so many throats that he knows not he is a murderer: the number makes him a kind of hero. How is it to be otherwise? Great cities require great self-restraint, profound and prolonged processes of education. If the moral element once gets loose, if it begins to trifle and to tamper with the realities of life, then the battle is to the strong; let the weak go where they may. It is only Christianity that can save any city. Man ought not to trust himself when he becomes only part of a multitude. He may be but trusted or chastened or highly utilised when he is but one or a unit amongst a few; but when he becomes a million thick on the ground it would seem as if a kind of miasma rose from the sweltering mass and poisoned the men that breathed it. It is sad. It is true. "Oh, it was pitiful, near a whole city full, hope, health, strength, joy she had none." What is this mystery of numbers? What is this miracle of continuing, increasing in numerical force? An evil passion comes along with it. Things are concealed, or are so perplexed, embarrassed, and wrapped up, that it is difficult to find the central line of justice and right and truth. What mercy can there be in a crowd? The centre has been lost, the guiding, dominating, uplifting principle is for the time being in abeyance. It is easy for a crowd to become mad.

The city, saith Nahum, "is all full of lies": literally, the city is a lie. They spoke cannon-balls in the olden time. We cannot tell in our softened language what the prophet really said, or how the prophet truly said it; but the opening of his lips was the utterance of a great storm. Is our property a lie? Dare we really analyse our possessions? Was every sixpence taken honestly? Did we not tell the victim that we were his friend,

and whilst the tears were in his eyes, expressive of gratitude, did we not put our hands into his pockets, and rob him of his earnings? Nahum saw that in his day there was an organised oppression—"The noise of a whip, and the noise of the rattling of the wheels, and of the prancing horses, and of the jumping chariots." All this pointed in the direction of forbidden organisation. No Hebrew believer had any right to a horse. The horse was a forbidden animal; the very suggestion brought with it the idea of self-reliance, pomp, pride, war. As Solomon increased in horses he decreased in piety. It is not so with us, because of our different relations; but we must take the typology of the Old Testament as indicating possibilities along the line of our own civilisation. To have an army is to fight, to want to fight. An army is itself a provocation to war. Would God all civilised countries could simultaneously disarm themselves, and thus cut off the devil at one source. But the argument is of course only indicated by particular instances; it is not exhausted. All power is dangerous. Wealth without humility, true rational piety, is the horse that tempts the owner, is the army that incites the possessor to defiance, to war, to contempt, which is worse than either. Yet what genius we lavish in our organisations of oppression! How we set actions and policies and movements in such relations that we cannot put our fingers upon the guilty spot, and say, That is it—burn it. We have put evil into the kaleidoscope, and whilst we are looking at one image, we are turning it round into another, and we cannot say which is the guilty combination. What if God should deal with us in our corporate capacity, and burn the city? When men begin to divide up evil, and say, "You shall take a part, and you shall take another part, and a third man shall come in and share both the parts with us, and we shall play into one another's hands in such a manner as that nobody shall be able to say exactly how we came by anything we have,"—man cannot handle such knavery, but God will burn it.

"The horseman lifteth up both the bright sword and the glittering spear: and there is a multitude of slain, and a great number of carcases; and there is none end of their corpses; they stumble upon their corpses" (ver. 3).

And men say, What havoc is this? How awful is pestilence; how terrible is war; how saddening and sickening is the sight

of the overthrow of a great city! This is, or may easily become, wasted sentiment. What are corpses, what are carcases, what are dead bodies, compared with starved souls, depleted minds, cheated hearts, blighted opportunities? Reserve your tears for the true tragedy. What of this crying over bleached bones? Who has spent his tears so? On the other side there are murdered souls; minds robbed of their education; hearts enthralled that ought to be at liberty: there let your head be a fountain of tears. Men will not weep at the right sights. They are touched by the bodily, the physical, the concrete, the tangible. They see some poor little white-faced waif on the road, and they are properly touched by that sight; but they might see next to that poor little pilgrim some mighty man, gold-bedizened and feathered and coloured, or riding in some chariot of pomp, and they ought to cry over him. He may be the true object of pity. He does not look it; he has covered up the dead bones well; he has hidden his mental and moral poverty under a veil of plucked flowers, costly enough; but what we pluck we kill, and they shall wither away. There is no need to undervalue, or to pass by in contempt, or neglect things that are obviously in want of attention; at the same time we ought not to dismiss from our mind the doctrine that moral poverty, spiritual destitution, heartache and heartbreak are the things that should constrain our intensest attention, and draw forth our most influential activity.

What is God's relation to all this evil prosperity, this horrible progress, founded upon hellish policy? When cities have given themselves over to whoredoms and witchcrafts and forbidden luxuries, what does God say? He says, "I am against thee." Is God ever so terrible as when he is quiet? There is no thunder in this declaration, and yet it is all lightning: "I am against thee." What miracle is this? The Creator against the creature, God against man, all heaven against the city, the metropolis that ought to be the mother city, and the fairest among the daughters of cities. Yet this is right, this is the very sun in the heavens; without this sun of righteousness we can grow no flowers of morality, no plants of good conduct: this is the sun that warms the roots of virtue. Here is an eternal principle; we may run into it and be restful and glad. God is against all evil. The bad

man who has succeeded for a time shall have a miserable end ; the ox knee-deep in succulent pasture knows not (for he is a beast) that he is being fatted for the knife. These hard things must be said ; we would rather not say them ; it would be easier to sing some lullaby, to tell some tale that would lure and delight the fancy ; it would be intellectually easier to weave some little fancy network that men would admire because skilfully done, outdoing the cobweb in fineness, and outdoing the bloom upon the flowers in exquisiteness : but this would be wasting time, this would be shutting the eyes to facts, this would be ignoring the tragedy that is killing the world. So there must be times of thunder and lightning and judgment and terrible pestilence ; there must be hours of disinfection.

Nineveh said she was strong. She walked around her walls and said, They are all bastions ; the enemy would bruise himself against these fortifications—more drink, more revelry, more gluttony, more devilry ! What did the Lord say ? “ Art thou better than populous No, that was situate among the rivers, that had the waters round about it, whose rampart was the sea, and her wall was from the sea ? ” Let us attend to the uses of history. Do not throw away the precedents that make up our recollections. He is wise who is rich in precedents, who knows what has happened, what has been done, who lives in the temple of history. No-Ammon fell ; the sacred name of the capital of Upper Egypt was rubbed out as the merest speck upon the page of Time. We know the city referred to by the more modern name of Thebes—a city of a hundred gates and twenty thousand chariots—and the Pharaohs of this great capital warred and conquered riotously from the Soudan to Mesopotamia ; trampling down everything, and showing their pride and pomp and power in all manner of ridiculousness of ostentation and wickedness and infamy of royal display. But God blotted out the city. He can do without any city ; he can make a metropolis in heaven. He would fain educate us by association ; he would turn our relationship to one another into a method of education, healthful progress ; he would make us co-contributors to one another’s highest well-being : but when we come and spoil God’s idea, though we may have as many gates and as many chariots as Thebes a

thousand times multiplied, he can destroy us, throw us into the sea, that we may be swallowed up as stones. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Then the Lord applies history, and says, "Thou also." That is the voice of all history. God never does anything that is complete in itself, final in its processes; whatever he does refers to the next century, the next city, the next man. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. Who died there? The richest man in the world—thou also shalt die. What, did that black shadow called the funeral pass through all these terraces of flowers, parterres of choice plants? Did that blighting shadow fall upon the blooming beauty of the full summer day? Yes—thou also shalt be carried to thy last resting-place. Has pride been rebuked? Has vanity been snubbed; has self-trust been defeated and overwhelmed? Yes—"Thou also." These are the lessons of history. They thought to build out God with clay; they had walls that they erected against him, and he said they should be eaten up as by a cankerworm. How contemptuous can God be! He said that in their pride and haughtiness they should be as the "first-ripe figs," so that if a man should shake the tree the figs would fall into his mouth. He needs no ladder to climb, he needs no elaborate machinery by which to get at the fruit; if he will put his hand upon the bark and shake it, the figs will fall down upon the ground. So easily does God hold us in the grip of his almightiness; so that he shakes down tower and temple and town and mountain; so that he dries up seas and rivers and turbulent streams; he sends a blight upon the brain, and the wise man who was all genius yesterday is asking a child to take him home; the man who yesterday commanded listening senates or directed great enterprises, or was the envy, the joy, and the pride of all who knew him, so stalwart in mind, so capable in action, so hospitable in the entertainment of all weakness,—he does not know his own child. There is but a step between thee and death. Oh, proud man, thou art but a proud fool. Pride and progress can never go together. Pride and education are sworn enemies. Self-trust and reality of character can never cohere. We live our greatest life in our humility, in our reverence, in our aspiration. Why fight against this God? If

the cities have outwitted him, where are they? You should be able to find them. Where is old Babylon? Where the mocking, mighty, pompous, overbearing Rome? Where are those cities that have threatened God and lived? You ought to be able to find them if they have been victorious. Now we are called upon to acquaint ourselves, and be at peace with him; we are called into harmony, and the way by which this harmony is attained is one way and only one, and unchangeable and complete, and that is the way we call the Gospel of Christ, the doctrine of the Cross, the doctrine of atonement, the doctrine of something being done for man that man could never do for himself, and which he lays hold of by the energy called faith. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. You may reform the city, but you cannot regenerate it. That is a divine act, and if the city is ever to become a sanctuary of progress, education, liberty, and independence, it must be wrought out by spiritual methods; our life must come from the quarter called true religion,—not conventional religion, not ecclesiastical religion, but the Cross, the mighty power of love, the mighty power of sacrifice. I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; and when all our reformers and ameliorators and improvers and decorators have done their utmost, they have only painted the devil, they have not destroyed him; they have hidden momentarily his innate and everlasting hideousness under a coating of foolish ornamentation. We can only do this work by going right back to Jesus Christ, and living as he lived. Let us try that method.

HABAKKUK.

[NOTE.—“Of the facts of the prophet’s life we have no certain information, and with regard to the period of his prophecy there is great division of opinion. The Rabbinical tradition that Habakkuk was the son of the Shunammite woman whom Elisha restored to life is repeated by Abarbanel in his commentary, and has no other foundation than a fanciful etymology of the prophet’s name, based on the expression in 2 Kings iv. 16. Equally unfounded is the tradition that he was the sentinel set by Isaiah to watch for the destruction of Babylon (comp. Isa. xxi. 16 with Hab. ii. 1). In the title of the history of Bel and the Dragon, as found in the LXX. version in Origen’s *Tetrapla*, the author is called ‘Habakkuk, the son of Joshua, of the tribe of Levi.’ Some have supposed this apocryphal writer to be identical with the prophet (Jerome *proem. in Dan.*). The psalm in Chap. iii. and its title are thought to favour the opinion that Habakkuk was a Levite. . . . It was during his residence in Judæa that he is said to have carried food to Daniel in the den of lions at Babylon. This legend is given in the history of Bel and the Dragon, and is repeated by Eusebius, Bar Hebræus, and Eutychius. It is quoted from Joseph ben Gorion (*B. J.* xi. 3) by Abarbanel (*Comm. on Hab.*), and seriously refuted by him on chronological grounds. The scene of the event was shown to mediæval travellers on the road from Jerusalem to Bethlehem (*Early Travels in Palestine*, p. 29). Habakkuk is said to have been buried at Keilah in the tribe of Judah, eight miles east of Eleutheropolis (Eusebius, *Onomasticon*). Rabbinical tradition places his tomb at Chukkok, of the tribe of Naphthali, now called *Jakuk*. In the days of Zebenus, bishop of Eleutheropolis, according to Nicephorus (*H. E.* xii. 48) and Sozomen (*H. E.* vii. 28), the remains of the prophets Habakkuk and Micah were discovered at Keilah.”—SMITH’S *Dictionary of the Bible*.]

Chapter i.

THE BURDEN OF HABAKKUK.

“The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see” (ver. 1).

THIS is the way of the Bible. It is the way of personal testimony. It is the way of individual experience. Habakkuk has not come to comment upon himself, but to tell us what he himself “did see.” If prophets and preachers and teachers would do this the world would soon be religiously

awakened. What are we apt to do? To deal in photographs. Here is a photograph of what our fathers believed three hundred years ago. What have I to do with that? I look at it, form an opinion about it, and ask about the life of this day. You do not like your own old photographs. You were pleased with them at the time when they were taken, and you generously gave some of them away to your friends, and now you scarcely identify them, and you beg your friends to allow you to replace them with something better. Yet you have photographed the creed of three hundred years ago, and you worship it like a fetish. Why do you not tell us what you have seen, what you feel? We do not want the photograph of the man as he was when he was a child, we want him to-day, his own personality, to stand before us and talk to us the language of the day, and delight us with the recital of his immediate consciousness of God and experience of life. This is the genius of the Bible. We do not find that the men rise up with great anxiety to conform themselves to lines which somebody else laid down a thousand years before; the prophets, man after man, come forward and say, "I saw." Very good; what did you see? Write the biography of your soul; tell us what happened between you and God when you were locked up together in confiding conference. That will do us good. Your ink will be blood; we have had pale ink enough, we now want the vermilion of the heart. But if you do not happen to conform to the testimony which somebody else has borne? So much the better. God is not the God of monotony. But if your testimony should be unique? God be thanked. At present one man is so much like another that we cannot tell which is which. We want uniqueness of religious testimony, poignancy of religious emphasis; we want men who believe something, and who state it, and explain it, and who are prepared to drop it immediately that the true revelation comes to claim the occupancy of the mind and heart. We carry our religion like a load. It does not grow in us, it is not part of ourselves. When we want to know what it is we go to the library. Any religion that is kept on the bookshelves can be stolen. Lay up for yourselves faith where thieves cannot break through nor steal. Have an experience of your own; compare it with the experience of others, either for its confirmation or its expansion, or for its

possible adaptation to best uses. Prophet after prophet has come before us in this PEOPLE'S BIBLE, and each man has come to tell us not what some other man saw, but what he himself beheld and handled of the word of life.

Habakkuk conducts a kind of dialogue, and if the paradox may be allowed it seems to be a dialogue mainly on his own side. To call it a monologue would be hardly correct. He talks to God; he has it out with God; he plies God with sharp questions. He will have practical matters attended to; he says, Lord, this is evil; how did it come to be in thy universe, thou fair One, whose face is beauty, whose voice is music? He could not write a long prophecy in that strain. Jesus Christ could not be a minister more than three years; Habakkuk can only write his three chapters. He was no magician in the elaboration of sentences; every sentence in Habakkuk was itself a Bible. There is no such book in all the canon as Habakkuk. The very word means *strong embrace*. He gets hold of God, and throws him in the gracious wrestle. He will not let God go. On the one side he represents pessimism or despair as it never was represented before, and on the other he rises to heights of faith which even David did not attain with all his music. We shall find sentences in Habakkuk that leave all the prophets and minstrels of the Old Testament far away down in the clouds, whilst Habakkuk himself is up beyond the cloud-line, revelling in morning light.

He begins with the dark outlook:—"O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear? even cry unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save!" He apparently forgot that other men had been crying. When a man is praying he must pray all out of his own heart; if he adopt the words of others he must so adopt them as to make them part of himself. We are afraid of egotism; the prophets were not; we are little men, they were great men. "O Lord, how long shall I cry?"—not how long shall Moses and all the great prophets of after ages cry, but how long shall I be kept praying when I might receive an answer instantaneously? Why delay the reply? I have cried until my eyes are tears, and my voice is but a hoarse whisper; I can hardly cry any

more. This is natural impatience ; this is man as he is in his true estate. Man wants to be getting on ; the Lord rests in eternity. We cannot tell why he delays, but his delay is goodness. We have lived long enough ourselves to see some outline of that fact. Habakkuk saw only the outside ; he saw the violence and the iniquity and the grievance, the strife and the contention, saw only the foam at the top ; he did not know why the water boiled so, he did not understand the ministry of conflict ; it lay beyond his ken to see how disinfection requires certain processes, and how we have to outgrow ourselves by continual war within and without. There must be an interior view. Even if we had no revelation upon this point, we must, if we receive the first notion of God, come to the conclusion that there is another view than that which is external. John Stuart Mill was right there. He said, If there is a God, he is not almighty, or he would put an end to war and pain and death and trouble of every kind. How difficult it is for a man to be both a logician and a philosopher ; how difficult to be both an edge and a point, or a point and an edge. If one view only could be taken of the circumstances which we sum up under the name of providence, and if that view were wholly an external one, such criticism would be just. We can but say to all such young men, Your eyes are blind ; and say of them, Lord, open their eyes that they may see. The Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he came to the old prophet, and he saw that within the range that was occupied by horses and chariots and men of war there was a cordon of angels, a circumference of light. If we can only see the outside, what right have we to pronounce upon the interior ? It is enough for us to know that there is an interior view, that God takes it, and that all things are working according to a fixed and unchangeable plan, and that in reality, however much we may be appearing to do, we are doing nothing ; we cannot finally resist or turn aside the purpose of heaven.

Habakkuk had a good understanding of his own times. That is precisely what the Church has not ; that is, I am afraid, precisely what ministers have not. They have a wonderful understanding about the early centuries ; they could discuss themselves into exhaustion by talking over the fourth century.

We have nothing to do with the fourth century; to all intents and purposes that century is dead and gone; we want to know about our own century, our own immediate tragedies and necessities. He is not a learned man who lives in the fourth century. I want a learned ministry, but it must be learned in the human heart, learned in human sorrow, learned in the arts and wiles of the devil. I do not want the learning that is archaic and mouldy, but the learning that seeks to illumine and liberate souls this day.

How did Habakkuk state his case?—"Therefore the law is slacked"; literally, Therefore the law is chilled. Derivatively, Therefore the law is paralysed. To this condition hast thou brought society, thou deified Indifference! Such would be the apostrophe of ignorance, bordering on blasphemy. Yet from the eternal point of view there is no other criticism to be pronounced. Things do look dark as against the idea of providence. Facts seem to contradict the proposition that there is a God, there is a government, there is a throne, there is a Cross, there is a Spirit of Righteousness, there is a Holy Ghost. Look those facts in the face; but always beware of the sophistry of facts. Wise men handle facts very charily, because they have had every reason to distrust them in the past. As we have often seen, facts are little anecdotes, small occurrences, things that really were, taking the word in its Latin derivation, done; but when looked at in their isolation give false impressions, and false scents to the inquisitive mind, and mislead the Church, and betray its best wisdom into the most inexcusable folly. Have nothing to do with facts, until you have set them in such a relation that they enlighten one another, explain one another, and get into the right perspective and colour; then they pass from the region of fact into the larger region of truth. Truth is larger than fact; parable is larger than occurrence. He only knows the history of his country aright who has read it in the pages of philosophical fiction. We want atmosphere, colour, relation, apocalyptic intermingling of things; and then, without being able to cite the so-called fact, we atmospherically and sympathetically know all that has occurred. It is true that the law in the days of the prophet was chilled or paralysed; is it any better to-day? Not a bit.

The law is chilled still—slack, chilled, paralysed, in many instances. The law has been turned into a beast of burden; the law has been hired by the long purse; the law has been kept at bay by social dignity and social influence. But by the force of Christian ministry and Christian teaching the law in this country is gradually claiming its proper sovereignty, and it will crush with perfect quietness, with perfect dignity, the plutocratic devils that have sought to pervert it to their own uses. We shall see God in many an event; we shall see the far-spreading wickedness of some cut down, and levelled with the dust; meantime, let prophets cry, and shout out in prayer as if in agony; they disturb not God's eternity, nor does their impatience turn his righteousness into impotent clamour. Stand still, and see the salvation of God. If you are yourself right you shall come out of your difficulties triumphant. Not if you meddle, and unlawfully and foolishly interfere, but if you hide yourselves in the pavilion of God, if you are half-dead you shall live, and if you have one foot in ruin it shall be taken out, and both your feet shall stand on the rock of prosperity. Let us recognise facts, and also let us recognise truth, history, experience, and abide in the sanctuary of God.

Now the cry is: "Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder-marvellously: for I will work a work in your days, when ye will not believe, though it be told you." The word "believe" is a keyword in this prophecy. Habakkuk is the prophet of faith; at last he will sing a song that David would have paused in his harp-playing to have heard; he will entrance the heavens by his triumphant music. The people will not believe the miracles that are being worked in their own day. There are men who would almost die for miracles that were wrought thousands of years ago; there are other men who work themselves up into great perfervidness, amazing distress of mind, in defence of miracles that occurred twenty centuries before they were born. The one thing the Lord cannot get men to do is to believe in the miracles of their own day. There are miracles being worked to-day in abundance, and yet we are standing antagonistically in reference to one another, and calling one another heretics because of a certain relation to miracles that

occurred five thousand years ago. O blind men! stupid minds! fools to let the King pass by whilst we are talking about his appearances a millennium since! Who has eyes to see, let him see; who has ears to hear, let him hear. Every day is a new Bible; every event is a new miracle. The ages roll on to the music of miracles. We will be literalists instead of spiritualists; we will bind ourselves down to things that seem to be wrought for us, instead of taking paper and pen, and writing swiftly the things that God is now doing. By this time the Bible would have been larger than the world, if we had recorded the interpositions of God, the miracles of Christ, the triumphs of the Cross.

What is this wonderful work that God is going to do in the days of the prophet? He is going to "raise up the Chaldeans." Read the description:—

"For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwellingplaces that are not theirs. They are terrible and dreadful: their judgment and their dignity shall proceed of themselves" (vers. 6, 7).

See what they do in verses 9 and 10:—

"They shall come all for violence: their faces shall sup up as the east wind, and they shall gather the captivity as the sand. And they shall scoff at the kings, and the princes shall be a scorn unto them: they shall deride every strong hold; for they shall heap dust, and take it."

God raises up the enemy; Gods sends the pestilence; God tells the wolf to go out and bite the flock; God fills the air with destruction. He is not afraid to say so. All this means that we are governed upon central principles, that conduct is the touchstone, and that by our life we make the world what it is even from the divine standpoint. Blessed be God for opposition. We are made by conflict; we are chastened and perfected by depletion and sorrow. Thank God for all the unanswered questions in the mind. There are those who would have no questions unanswered. What a world it would be to live in if there were no interrogatories that lay beyond our imagination. Questions—serious, profound, practical—are as the shore-line; they mark the termination of the land. We would have them answered,

and we can only answer them by drowning ourselves in the great ocean. Questions are inspirations; questions are humiliations; questions are invitations. We should die without questions—hard questions, insoluble, obstinate, mocking questions; they keep us at the right point, subdue us into the right spiritual condition, and yet promise us that by-and-by all that is necessary for us to know shall be revealed. We shall have questions under our review, when our time is no longer broken up by sin and pain and sorrow and night; for in the higher school there is no night, it is all working time, and as for sorrow and sighing, they will have fled away. When we ask God to account for the mysteries of his providence he turns away from us as we would turn away from impertinent inquirers. Life is so made, account for it as we may, that it can only be developed, strengthened, chastened, purified, perfected by daily suffering.

How does Habakkuk get rest? He gets rest by a right view of God:—"Art thou not from everlasting?" The very word soothes and comforts the troubled soul. Given a life seventy years long, and oh the trouble, the disquiet, the discomfort, the unrest, the questioning, the practical atheism; but given a conception of eternity, and the billows roll themselves into harmonic peace, and become elements of controlled strength. What time we are afraid we should hide ourselves in the years of the Most High. When we think everything is going to ruin we should invoke the genius of eternity. This brings us to an illustration often employed, but always useful. The earth lies on one side within the limits of geography, on the other it enters into the mystery of astronomy. As a measurable globe it is full of inequalities; it has great warts upon its face called mountains, it has great delvings in its side called valleys, it is punctured with immense caves. Nothing can be more irregular than the surface of the earth; but taken up into astronomic motion, where are the great mountains, caverns, valleys, inequalities? Where are they? Lost, when the world is swung like a censer around the central fire. So it is with us. What mountainous difficulties we have, what cavernous troubles, what beatings of the sea upon our little shore, what shakings of the hills! That is the geographical view: but caught up in the wider gravitation, and made part of a grand

solar system, inequalities there are none, velocity smooths them all out, and the higher relations settle into unity and beauty and music, things that were aberrant, eccentric, and unmanageable. Blessed God, so it shall be in the winding up of all this little scheme of things. We talk of Chaldeans, invasions, wars, troubles, commotions, earthquakes, pestilences,—forgive the babble of thy nursery children. When we are men, and clothed with light, we shall look down upon this elementary criticism as almost bordering upon profanity; but we shall recover ourselves, and say, In the days of our ignorance God winked at our folly, but now in the days of our manhood we will say, He hath done all things well.

PRAYER.

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, heaven and earth are full of thy glory. Who is holy as the Lord? The heavens are not clean in thy sight, nor are the angels guiltless of folly. Yet hast thou said unto us by thy Son, Be ye holy, as ybur Father in heaven is holy. Who can attain? who can apprehend? We are dust and ashes; we are a wind that cometh for a little time and passeth away: how can we be perfect with the perfectness of God? But thou hast sent unto us thy Holy Spirit that he may take of the things of Christ and show them unto us, that he may dwell in us, that he may sanctify us wholly, body, soul, and spirit, and make us beautiful as a palace built for God. The blood of Jesus Christ thy Son cleanseth from all sin: by that blood we become a holy Church, without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; glorious Church. Help us daily in this upward direction; strengthen every good resolve; help us to resist every temptation; may we know the enemy, his wiles, his persistence, his strength. Comfort us with the assurance that he that is with us is more than all that can be against us: thus may our courage be sustained, thus may we be saved from despair. Teach us that growth is imperceptible, assure us that we may be growing in grace without ourselves fully knowing it; may we cling the more closely to Christ because of our weakness, may we tarry within the shadow of the Cross. Save us from ourselves, from trust in our own power, which is as a cloud driven by the wind; lead us to repose completest faith upon God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Encourage us; let some beam of sunshine fall upon the loneliest path; let some word or tone of music come to the addest heart. May the weakest soul say, in the power of the Holy Ghost, hat from this moment he will be better. The Lord hear the oath, and seal it in heaven. Amen.

Chapter ii.

ON THE LOOK OUT.

"I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch" (ver. 1).

THIS was the conclusion of asking questions of the most painful and distressing kind. Here then is a lesson for all time. A strong-headed man like Habakkuk, whose very name suggests, etymologically, "strong embrace of God," has his questions; he is puzzled and perplexed by the whole play of things: the tragedy seems to have no beginning, no key, no end. Habakkuk therefore puts his questions—"Art thou not from everlasting?" Then why this contention, collision, confusion? Why this universal misery? Art thou not of purer eyes than to behold iniquity? Why then dost thou look on when the wicked man eats up, devours—that is the word—swiftly and cruelly shuts his jaws upon the man that is more righteous than himself? Why dost thou make us, as if in mockery, like the fishes of the sea, yea, as the creeping things, that have no ruler over them—a wild and furious democracy of disorder? Other questions he puts. Thus he tortures himself, until he says, Away with you! I will stand, I will watch, I will wait. Etymologically, Habakkuk says he will stand as a servant stands. Everything depends upon the spirit of our standing. There be fine critics who stand, and the Lord takes no notice of their posture; he allows them to stand until they drop down dead: he has nothing to say to the merely intellectual vanity of criticism. Habakkuk will stand as a servant. The attitude is indicative of reverence, expectancy, willingness to respond. What a stoop there is in the attitude, even though it be upright to the eye! There is a line of inclination which God sees even in the upright attitude, and in that line he sees condescension, homage, obedience. They who stand so are refreshed by their standing,

the exercise gives them further strength; it is not a position of exhaustion, but a self-recruiting position, and whilst it is being exhibited and realised, time is nothing. Philosophy has tried to humiliate time; philosophy has laughed at both time and space; in some of its most audacious moods philosophy has denied both. Philosophy has always been struggling to be almost religious. It is difficult for a metaphysician to be flippant. He deals with shadows, symbols, ghostly typologies, and beginnings of things. He lives where he wants great silence, or the line of his thought will be broken, and he shall have his many pains for nothing. But this is a religious emotion which destroys time and space and labour, and seizes but one grand thought—Immortality. Philosophy is vexatious; religion is calm, and is, being calm, tranquillising in its effect upon the soul.

“I will stand and watch”: literally, I will spy out. There is a microscopic gaze as well as a telescopic survey. The telescope is proud; it admits nothing but planets and solar systems into its sanctum of vision. Right proud lenses are they that are in the telescope: suns may look at themselves in such mirrors, but little things, tiny specks, animalcular life, such cannot come within the dignity of the telescope. But they have their mediums, instruments; they have their microscope, and to the microscope they all come forth at once, saying, with the thunders and the lightnings, Here are we also, part of thy household, thou great Father of every life. Habakkuk says, Not the telescope now, but the microscope. I will spy out little things; or, I will have an instrument made that can see the very least things at a distance. Great religious enthusiasms are not tramelled by your mechanical limitations, or pestered by your little metaphorical consistencies. Great religious emotion says, I will combine the telescope and the microscope; I will have a binary instrument of some sort, and it shall show me not the great only but the little, not the little only but the great; I will sweep horizons, and read the story of the grass blade.

Habakkuk will stand therefore on what the mariner calls the look-out. When you have been to sea you have observed men at the front of the vessel who were apparently doing nothing but

walking across the ship backward and forward ; looking now and then furtively ; but they were doing a special and necessary business, namely, looking out. When the layman looked out he saw nothing ; the skilled mariner, the trained eye looked, and rang a bell. We have looked after the ringing of that bell to see what the ringing meant, and the horizon was all grey, dull, without one broken line upon it ; but presently after a few more throbbings of the engine there was a tuft of steam in the far distance, or a sail ; it was that the man on the look-out saw, and when he saw it he announced the event to those who were in charge of the vessel. Habakkuk says, I will be on the look out to-night ; I will sit up all through the darkness and I will watch, because at any moment there may be a vision. God's stars sometimes come forth suddenly, and I cannot tell when they may appear ; I will therefore look out. The world sleeps—the prophet is spying, peering, watching, searching the horizon for signs of coming devastation or dawning light. Bless God for the prophets. They have a hard time of it ; it must have been agonising to have been taken up and made a prophet. It is better within given limits to be commonplace, to buy and sell and get gain, and live by the hands. All this fancy life, this discipline that comes through a fiery imagination, this horrible power of seeing the unseen, and this maniac madness of telling men that there are things in front of them which it is impossible for them to discern,—this should be the preacher's life. He should always be ten years ahead of everybody ; so far ahead as to be called foolish, mad, eccentric, absurd, raving ; and yet he should have such patience, the very quietness of God, that when he hears men say seven years after that he was right, he should simply smile at their tardiness. He knows that he is right. But for this consciousness the prophets could not have lived : it could not have been an easy thing to have been called a madman seven times a day.

When the Lord did speak to Habakkuk he delivered a brief discourse which ought to constitute the first lesson, the middle and the last lesson of every Christian preacher. We need no book of lectures so long as we have these words :—

“And the Lord answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet

for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie : though it tarry, wait for it ; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him : but the just shall live by his faith " (vers. 2-4).

Writing has a function. Fasten this thing down in words ; the words will be very poor to him who reads words only, but they will be full of intellectual stimulus, suggestion, wealth, to him who sees in every letter a thought, in every shadow a variety of high colour. We must have a book. No one man can write it all. It must be a book of letters in our mother tongue, and if there be in it no contradictions, swift, sharp collisions, suspect it—suspect it ! Any man can make a smooth surface ; the very poorest mechanic that ever shouldered a bag of tools can make a fair show on the outside. A kitchen table looks much more respectable than a forest : there is an evident respectability about the one, there is a ruggedness about the other ; there are caverns and dark places that might house lions and tigers about the other. God's Bible is full of cavernous recesses, tangled jungles, and cataracts of names we cannot remember two moments together ; and yet, reading it all, and reading it all at once, it falls into harmony and music, as the world becomes quite beauteous when swung with astronomic force around the central fire. The earth is geographically about as rough as it can be, there is hardly space upon it to sit down on with any comfort ; but caught astronomically, swung round the sun, they say it is beautiful even to shining. You can deal with the Bible geographically or astronomically ; fool is he who never rises to the astronomic use and vision of revelation. "Make it plain upon tables." There must be some very plain words in revelation ; the presence of these plain words will make the presence of other words almost contradictory and offensive ; for we say now and again, as we read the vision, "That is plain ; why is not all as plain as that ?" Through and through the Bible there are short sentences, definite lines, as to the scope and meaning of which there can be no mistake, and then on the next page there is nothing but cloud, sometimes breaking a little as if in calculated mockery, and then closing so suddenly as to constitute a frown. It is to be written so plainly that he may run that readeth it, or he may read it that runneth. Make your statements to suit the people to whom you make

them. If the young preacher will heed that he will be wise as Solomon to the end of his ministry. So write as to suit the age, the occupations of the men that are round about you. Are the men leisurely? Are they enjoying so much of this world's goods that they can take time so easily? Then you may write accordingly. Are they in haste, are they swiftly passing to and fro, is it a moment and no more—here—gone? Who shall preach to that swift-moving age? The man who can photograph instantaneously, the man in whose every sentence is a condensed Bible, the man of swift heart-speech. Yet there are those little Habakkuks who will not do this; they will only write for one kind of people, and that kind of people they can never persuade to pay the least attention to them. They will write for the absentees; they will answer the people who have never spoken, and they will set up objections which their own hearers never imagined; they will offer prizes for amateur infidelity.

The vision does not come true all at once, and you may have to wait for a long time. We have to wait the appointed time. Everything is calculated. God is the timekeeper. You can hasten nothing, you can stop nothing: God reigneth. When he wants you at the front no man can keep you back, and when he does not want you at the front you cannot even force yourself into conspicuousness. O that men were wise, that they understood these things, that they would believe that everything is settled for them—every soul a plan, every day a divine study, every soul a divine care: "O rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him, and he shall give thee thine heart's desire." It is not in life to disappoint the expectation that is just, the expectation that is reverent and grateful. God's words are seeds; they are immediately blessings, and they are harvests in promise. In all the Bible there is something to be going on with just now; there is an immediate feast, and yet the feast on which we now regale the soul is but a dim outline of that banquet which shall last throughout eternity.

God then rebukes a certain class of the community, saying, "Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him." God is against all swollenness, vanity, self-exaltation, self-trust. So

are you, if you have learned the lessons of experience. God is in these respects but man infinitised. Thus God speaks of himself, "Like as a father"—but a father multiplied by infinity;—like as a mother, but a mother that represents ideal womanhood. So the Lord will not have the self-exalting man. Find a young man who is going to do everything, who thinks that he can manage all things easily, so much so that he need never pay the faintest attention to them; find a boy who laughs at examinations, who calls them "exams.," and then thinks that they are done; find a man who is going to arrange and settle everything, and you find a man who will one day be about the poorest looking creature you ever saw drenched through and through on the top of a hill. It comes to this always. All bounce is condemned. Find a young life that says, I will try: I am rather afraid I shall not be able to do it all at once, but I will do all I can; let that be the frank, sincere speech of a childlike heart, and it comes to honour, and none can keep it back from the wages of merit. Humility is always crowned, not mock-humility, but sincere self-distrust, that peculiar quality of self-distrust which says, If this has to be done I must do a great deal of it when nobody is looking at me; I will wait until all the others retire, and then I will have two hours to myself, and see if I can manage it. That man shall be crowned and envy cannot hinder the coronation, nor calumny destroy the fair fame that is built on reason and on industry.

"The just shall live by his faith." We do not get the full force of these words. The greatest annotators upon the Hebrew text assure us that the words, "shall live" mean shall live eternally. There is immortality then in the Old Testament. We have had this sentence in the negative in the first chapter, in the twelfth verse; Habakkuk says, "We shall not die." Believe the higher emotion and not the merely critical pedantry of men. The soul is only its very self now and then, but in that now and then it sees God's word, it realises God's promise, it is what God meant it to be. Here is a man in times that we call pagan who stands up and says that we shall not die; and on what does he base this challenge to death? On God's own everlastingness; there is quality touching quality:—"Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine Holy One? We shall not die." "The just

shall live by his faith": the just shall never die; the just may be regarded as immortal. There must be immortality in the Old Testament; if there is little of it literally it may be because there is so much of it assumptively; instead of looking upon it as a thing to be argued, it is the one thing that is beyond controversy.

There is a meaner life, there is a life that must die:—

"Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his! how long? and to him that ladeth himself with thick clay! [Felicitous contempt, delicate scorn, satire all sting! Think of a man lading himself with thick clay! This is what men do who serve mammon only: their cry is all day, More, more, more clay, more covering!] Shall they not rise up suddenly that shall bite thee, and awake that shall vex thee, and thou shalt be for booties unto them? Because thou hast spoiled many nations, all the remnant of the people shall spoil thee; because of men's blood, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein. Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil!" (vers. 6-9).

God will not have these high nests. You know it. When you were young, what you were going to be! What adornment and finery and vanity and presumption! Now that you are a wrinkled old woman tell us what life really is; tell us what you would be and do if you had the chance to begin again. And when you came from school to college, you remember, you were going to trample down everybody and set everything right, and now that you are a disappointed old grey-beard, tell us what is life: how would you do if you had to start once more? Where is the girl that was simple, frank, self-distrustful, industrious, almost silent, and absolutely without pretence? She is crowned among the mothers of Israel. Where is the young man that began at the bottom, and went up and said, I am afraid I am getting almost too high now: what am I in my father's house that I should have this elevation? Where will he end? In heaven. Here is your choice then: the life of the just, or the life of the clay-gatherer; the life of holiness, or the life of covetousness; the life that will have nothing that reason cannot explain and conscience justify and merit claim, or the life that will have a high nest without working for it and without climbing to it. It need be no Habakkuk who can forecast the future of men now. The Bible has, if we have inhaled its true spirit, made us all prophets. Show me a man, and I

will tell you his end ; not by my own sagacity, but by reading God's Book and watching the issues of divine history. Has Habakkuk anything evangelical about him ? Does he ever in all this faith-life of his touch the very highest line of vaticination ? He does ; he says, "The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." Oh, that is a great evangelical song ! God's will be done : thy kingdom come : thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven.

What is the end of all Habakkuk's waiting and watching and spying out ? This :—

"The Lord is in his holy temple : let all the earth keep silence before him" (ver. 20).

It is the Lord's doing ; he setteth up, he pulleth down ; he is indeed watching the wicked man devouring the upright, but presently he will lock his jaw, and send him away into everlasting darkness. The wicked man is doing menial service in God's house, and is showing that nothing can hinder the triumph and coronation of the righteous. "The Lord is in his holy temple : let all the earth keep silence before him." The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God : you do nothing by all your exclamation and fury and protection of the truth and watching lest anybody should injure the ark of God. Away with it ! God will take care of his own ark ; God will defend his own truth ; God will bring forth the judgment of the just like the morning ; yea, he shall set it on high like the glory of noontide. If religious men cannot be quiet, what men can enter into the mystery and the joy of tranquillity ? Everything is settled, fore-appointed, arranged. In that faith I live. Therefore no man can make me afraid. Your bitterest enemy cannot take one hair out of your head more than God counts and looks after and permits to go. And when the right time comes he will show you his purpose. You will first be humbled by the vision, and then you will ask for eternity in which to give sufficient praise.

ZEPHANIAH.

[NOTE.—“The chief characteristics of this book are the unity and harmony of the composition, the grace, energy, and dignity of its style, and the rapid and effective alternations of threats and promises. Its prophetic import is chiefly shown in the accurate predictions of the desolation which has fallen upon each of the nations denounced for their crimes; Ethiopia, which is menaced with a terrible invasion, being alone exempted from the doom of perpetual ruin. The general tone of the last portion is Messianic, but without any specific reference to the Person of our Lord. The date of the book is given in the inscription; viz., the reign of Josiah, from 642 to 611 B.C. This date accords fully with internal indications. Nineveh is represented as in a state of peace and prosperity, while the notices of Jerusalem touch upon the same tendencies to idolatry and crime which are condemned by the contemporary Jeremiah. It is most probable, moreover, that the prophecy was delivered before the eighteenth year of Josiah, when the reformation, for which it prepares the way, was carried into effect, and about the time when the Scythians overran the empires of Western Asia, extending their devastations to Palestine. The notices which are supposed by some critics to indicate a somewhat later date are satisfactorily explained. The king’s children, who are spoken of, in chap. i. 8, as addicted to foreign habits, could not have been sons of Josiah, who was but eight years old at his accession, but were probably his brothers or near relatives. The remnant of Baal (chap. i. 4) implies that some partial reformation had previously taken place, while the notices of open idolatry are incompatible with the state of Judah after the discovery of the Book of the Law.”—SMITH’S *Dictionary of the Bible*.]

Chapters i—iii.

THE CANDLE OF THE LORD.

“The word of the Lord which came unto Zephaniah” (i. 1).

OBERVE that the prophets never professed to tell what word of the Lord came to anybody else. That is the vital point; that is the point which we have all forgotten. Read the introductions which the men themselves wrote: where do they find their texts? In the mouth of the Lord. When does any prophet arise to say, “I am going to preach to you to-day from the words of some other prophet?” Because we have forgotten this, our

preaching has become archaic, jejune, and fruitless. Why do not men tell us what the Lord has said to them? Why have we so little personal testimony, so little real heart-talk? Hath the Lord ceased to be gracious to his people? Has he concluded his parable? Does he never whisper to any of us? Is the function of the Holy Ghost exhausted? Where is the personal pronoun? The devil has persuaded us to disuse it, and thus become modest; and whilst we are modest he is vigilant and destructive. What can it matter to you what the Lord said to some man countless thousands of years ago, if you do not adopt it, incarnate it, stake eternal destiny upon it, and thus make it your own? If a prophet here and there had said, "I will tell you what the Lord said to me," the case would have been different; but it is not so. Look at Isaiah: "The vision of Isaiah . . . which he saw." How strong, how clear, how emphatic, how likely to be interesting to the highest point! Here is an eye-witness: this is the kind of witness we like to have: what I saw, what I heard, what I felt, how I handled: now we are coming into close quarters with eternal mysteries. These men are not about to becloud our minds with speculations, and abstractions, and finely-spun theories; they make oath and say—then comes their affidavit. Have we any affidavit to make about God? Are we living upon a hearsay testimony? Is ours a providence by proxy? Did the Lord work wonders in the olden time, and hath he sunk now into forgetfulness of his people and his kingdom? Let sense answer. What does Jeremiah say? Jeremiah desires to comment upon the book of the prophet Isaiah? Not he. How, then, does he introduce himself? Like all the others, in a whirlwind, with the suddenness which begets attention: "The words of Jeremiah . . . to whom the word of the Lord came." So we have two personal witnesses in Isaiah and Jeremiah. Did anybody else receive a communication from heaven, from God? Hear Ezekiel: "I saw visions of God." Perhaps only these major prophets had these high chances, only they were majestic enough to see the morning for themselves, and other men must live upon the testimony of dead witnesses. Read, "The word of the Lord that came unto Hosea"; again, "The word of the Lord that came to Joel"; again, "The words of Amos"; again, "The vision of Obadiah"; once more, "The word of the Lord

came unto Jonah"; again, "The word of the Lord that came to Micah"; and again, "In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the Lord unto Zechariah." What does the last of the prophets say? "The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi." We want personal testimony, personal religion. What is your life? What is mine? We are not called to recite old history, but to live our own life in the face of day. If a man's religion be something that he has learned, it is something that he may forget; memory is not immortal: but if it be part of himself, if it be wrought into him by God the Holy Ghost, then long as life, or breath, or being lasts he can say, "I saw . . . I heard . . . I know." And when men would battle with him in angry and pointless words, and plague him with metaphysical reasoning which he cannot understand, he can say, with a child's simplicity, "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see."

Take care how you crush individuality out of the Church. It may be a very beautiful thing to smooth down all the hills and raise up all the valleys, and make this globe we call the earth into a shining surface; God did not make it so. Where does God approve monotony—pure equality as between one distance and another, one colour and another, one set of circumstances and another? He works by contrast. He has made inequality an element in the education and development of the world. The Lord hath his mountains in the Church, and his valleys; those that are of note among the apostles, and names that are not known beyond the fireside, of which they are the strength and joy. Were a man to stand up now and tell us what the Lord had done for him we should listen to him with great doubtfulness. We have lost the genius of personality, we have lost that tremendous weapon of individual testimony; it may be rough, and it may have been put to rude uses, but it is a weapon or instrument which God has often approved. It is wonderful to notice where the point of consistency begins in all these individual testimonies. The witness is marked by strong personality, and yet read through from the beginning of Isaiah to the close of Malachi, and though you are struck by personality, and almost aggressive personality, by a voice that becomes now and then

something approaching to clamorousness, there is a marvellous consistency in the whole prophecy. The prophets, many of whom never saw one another, never contradict each other's testimony upon moral questions; the spiritual vision is the same, the moral testimony is undivided; every man speaks according to his own mental capacity and mental peculiarity, and yet every man speaks the word of the Lord. Not in the method of the utterance, but in the substance of the declaration do we find the unity of the Church.

The prophets are the same in connecting sin and judgment:—

"I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the Lord. I will consume man and beast" (i. 2, 3).

Why? Always because of sin; always because there has been wrong done. The Lord never shows his omnipotence ostentatiously, as who should say, Behold, a thousand thunderbolts are mine, yea, twice ten thousand thunderbolts await my word: behold the artillery of heaven, thunder and lightning and tempest. There is no such display of resources, no such vapouring of strength. It is when sin is done, and repeatedly done, yea, done until it rises to heaven's very gates, that the Lord comes forth in judgment and in indignation, and overwhelms the adversary. We do not preach this consuming God now. There are persons who have left the church because the minister has declared the certainty of punishment. We now like the confectionery Gospel; specially do we like to be assured that, be lost who may, nothing can hinder our getting to heaven: as for the outsiders, they are vulgar, blatant atheists, and perdition is too good for them. We do not say this in words, but as we eat mouthful after mouthful of divine sweetness: we say it in significant and suggestive action. Still the great doctrine of judgment must be proclaimed by somebody; now and again there must arise a Zephaniah who hurls his thunder upon the age, and sees God enthroned in the majesty of judgment. Poor howling maniac! we will mock him and sneer at him, and pour upon him our elegant contumely; but he will await the awards of time; he speaks from the platform of eternity. Zephaniah is sure that nothing can ever change the law that bad seed means bad harvest. We shall have to empty the church before we can fill it. It is of no use to condemn the

sins of the fourth century, to expose the heresies of early centuries, and forget the crimes that disgrace the day in which we live. Why dig up old Arius, drag him out of his grave, and pelt him with orthodox stones, and thus get a reputation for being extremely orthodox? I will not do it. If any preacher chooses to fool away his time in talking about Arius, let him do so. I will speak about the men around about me, the crimes that darken the day, the winter of injustice that makes it almost impossible to live. If the Church will make itself a terror to evil-doers, it will become what Jesus Christ meant it to be, the living force of the day, the true tribunal where every man will get his deserts, whether he be good or whether he be evil.

The prophets were also at one in denouncing ceremonial hypocrisy. The people performed a good many things with their hands which they did not do with their hearts; and the Lord disbelieves them. The prophet says:—

“The Lord hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bid his guests” (i. 7).

He turned out the nations—they should not take his banquet—and he called the heathen. This is what the Church will not do. This is the divine providence. When the Church did not conduct itself properly, the Lord swept it out, and called in the pagan, the Gentiles. We are the guests that succeeded those that were bidden, but who either did not obey or who corrupted the feast. If the people who are in the Church now are not the right people, get rid of them; go out into the highways and the hedges, and compel them to come in. Above all things, let us get rid of respectability. The prophets, and Christ at their head, always condemned the religious hypocrites of their day.

Nor would the prophets be content when men substituted even one ceremony for another in a spirit of heathenish curiosity. When he saw the king's children clothed with strange apparel, the prophet protested. What was the apparel of Israel? A band of dark blue upon the fringes, at the four corners of their garments—that was all; but it marked the Israelite; it was a blue ribbon, but it indicated election, responsibility, and destiny. What did Israel say in the time of luxury? We will be as the heathen,

as the families of the countries ; we will drop all these little signs and badges of Israelitish vocation, and we will send for the foreign fashions. That is what men always do in luxurious times. Oh, the fool's talk we hear about the fashions from Paris ! Be sure that the country is going down when women are foolish enough to say, "I got this in Paris." Precisely the old heresy. And yet where is the woman strong enough, broad enough in mind, to say, "No, this is good homespun ;" "This belongs to the mother country ;" or, "I spun this myself" ? I like to see the dear old grannies in the country spinning away at their wheels, and they perhaps never heard that there is such a place as Paris. These are the people that make a country strong and healthy. When we forget home industries and home necessities we are in danger of slipping off the badge of liberty, and forgetting the masonic password of progress. Beware of luxury ; beware of unsanctified prosperity. It ruined Israel ; it will ruin any nation. How will God search his people ?

"I will search Jerusalem with candles" (i. 12).

Observe the minuteness ; take note of the detail. It shall not be a general inspection of surface, but "I will search Jerusalem with candles" : every hole and corner shall be looked into—motive, thought, purpose, far-away outlines of possible policies ; they shall be discovered in their plasmic beginning, their first inceptions and suggestions. The Lord does not look generally over the world, and say, "It is very good"—he goes into detail. The analysis of the Lord is terrible, unsparing ; but if it be terrible in the process it may be comforting in the result, for, blessed be God, there are some men who have the best of themselves hidden far away under much superincumbent infirmity and sort of conduct that they themselves are unable to approve. There are men whose hearts can only be discovered by the candle of the Lord, and the Lord himself will say to some, "You are last, but you shall be first. There is in you a seed you yourselves hardly knew of ; you have been looking at your external infirmities and difficulties, and struggles and temptations, and you have forgotten that right away down below all these there was a seed pod that shall grow up into fruitfulness and beauty in your Father's heaven. God's criticism is terrible because it is gentle

—gentle because it is terrible ; it may even be a terror to evil-doers, or an infinite comfort to those who want to do well.

How terrible is the searching of this candle ! It finds out some who say in their heart, “ The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil.” That is the atheism we have to be on our guard against ; unavowed atheism ; men who say one thing with their mouths and another with their hearts. In this case the men are professing to believe in God, and yet they are saying in their hearts in silence, “ The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil.” The outward atheist can do the Church no harm ; the man who is an avowed unbeliever, a vulgar assailant of faith, reverence, and religious purity, can do no harm ; but the man who is inside the Church, who has a lip orthodoxy and a heart heterodoxy, he is the Iscariot who would sell his Lord. If you are not orthodox in your hearts, say so ; if you do not believe these sublime verities of revelation, declare your unbelief, and go outside and assail the Church from an external position ; do not remain in the Church and cause dry-rot in the sanctuary. If you have any doubts or difficulties about the holiness and the moral beauty and spiritual necessity of Christianity, out with them, speak them boldly ; then they may be answered, and you may be comforted ; but do not be professing to serve God with your hand while he is not in your heart. Better a blundering speculating faith and an intense moral sincerity, than a beautiful speculating creed, and a heart that has lost its integrity.

So the old prophets are still amongst us in their spirit, in their appeal, in their claim for righteousness, and in their proclamation of judgment for wrongdoing. The worst of us may repent. Christ Jesus, God the Son, died for me, for you, for the whole world, in every age,—the just, for the unjust that he might bring us to God. I do not understand it, but I feel it ; I could not fully explain it, but I need all the Cross. If there is a sinner out of the final punishment who needs all Calvary, I am the man. There be those who say, “ How could Paul call himself the chief of sinners ? ” No man can call himself anything else who knows his heart, and feels what he might have been and perhaps what he would be if he could. I proclaim the everlasting

Gospel—salvation by sacrifice ; life by death ; peace by the atonement wrought on Calvary. Oh, mystery of righteousness ; mystery of love !

“Therefore their goods shall become a booty, and their houses a desolation : they shall also build houses, but not inhabit them ; and they shall plant vineyards, but not drink the wine thereof” (i. 13).

The Lord will correct this atheism. We often think of speculation ending in nothing ; often, indeed, speculation which begins in vapour ends in vapour : but in this case the people have departed from God in conduct as well as in theory, and therefore nothing short of physical punishment and material deprivation will meet the disastrous case. It is not to be supposed that God will punish men simply because they have changed intellectual opinions for what may seem to them to be honest reasons ; it is when doctrinal departure injuriously affects the conduct that God lifts his rod and smites by way of recompense.

If we continue our perusal of Zephaniah we shall find that even in so furious a prophet there are strains of music worthy of Gospel days :—

“Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment ; seek righteousness, seek meekness ; it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord’s anger” (ii. 3).

It is curious to observe how tentatively the prophet puts the possibility of good resulting from late repentance. How could Zephaniah suddenly subdue his tremendous fury and speak peacefully the words of divine pardon ? It could not be easy for him to descend from the whirlwind, and take up his position as a preacher of goodness. Singular it is, as we have often had occasion to notice, how the prophets first boil in fury and indignation against all evil, and then how they settle down into tranquil assurances that if man will repent God will forgive. Everything in the Old Testament would seem to have an evangelical trend. However the prophet may begin, he is sure to end in evangelical music. It was right that indignation should be the first tone, because the people had wandered from God, not a little here and there, but iniquitously, with a full and determined purpose. But whilst the prophet looks upon man’s sin, he also turns his eyes to

God's grace ; and, as in the New Testament so in the Old, where sin abounds grace doth much more abound. When Zephaniah opened his mission in such tones of tremendous threatening, we little imagined that he would be the speaker of promises to those whose hearts were softened in repentance.

In the third chapter we have words that are still truly and joyously evangelical. A curious trust is to be given to the people of God :—

“I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord” (iii. 12).

However various the interpretations that may be put upon this sentence, it would seem to fall into harmony with the words of the Lord Jesus when he said, “The poor ye have always with you.” Poverty is not an external question relating to merely transitory circumstances ; there is a mysterious providence about this placing of poverty in the midst of the nations ; we cannot comprehend it ; yet if we look at the educational and the chastening influences of poverty we may begin to surmise why the poor are left to us as a continual trust. As the sick-chamber is the church of the house, so the poor people in any community ought to draw out the tenderest solitudes and sympathies of those who are prosperous in this world's goods. Let us look out for opportunities of doing service to mankind, and we shall never fail to have field enough for the exercise of our fullest charity. A wondrous change is predicted by the prophet in these words :—

“The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies ; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth : for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid” (iii. 13).

We little expected this when Zephaniah opened his judgment. We expected the fire to devour every root, and that nothing would be left behind but white ashes ; and lo ! such has been the effect of the threatened judgment of God, that truth takes the place of lies, vice is displaced by virtue, and the mouth that was befouled with deceit is now found to be the instrument of purity and music. Do not despair of the worst. The worst should not despair of themselves. Whilst we live we may pray ; whilst we pray we

may hope; whilst we hope we may at any moment see the delivering light, the very smile and welcome of God.

In the remaining paragraph Zephaniah takes up his harp, and smites it with a willing hand; yea, he lifts up his voice also, and commands the daughter of Zion to join him in holy song :—

“Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem” (iii. 14).

Here fury ceases, and tranquil music fills the air, like a breeze from the better land. Nor is the exhortation expressive of a mere sentiment; it rather follows the assurance of a profound and glorious fact—“The Lord hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy.” For this reason Zion was to sing, Israel was to shout, and the daughter of Jerusalem was to rejoice with all her heart. A kind of heaven is promised to Jerusalem—“Thou shalt not see evil any more.” Tell the mariner that no more shall the sea be lashed into a storm; tell the wayfaring man that no more shall the lion rise up suddenly in his path; tell the toiler that no more shall blight devastate his harvest; and he will have some idea of the joy that must have filled the heart of Jerusalem when the Lord predicted that evil should not be seen any more within the lines of her beauty, within the security of her defences. What great feasts the Lord provides his people! How rapturous is the music of reconciliation!

“The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing” (iii. 17).

This is more than the usual Hebrew reduplication of words; it means that the divine heart and the human heart are one; it means that the Gospel has prevailed over sin, and that earth is being lifted up day by day to the very gate of heaven. Remember the tenderness and the loving kindness of God.

“I will undo all that afflict thee: and I will save her that halteth, and gather her that was driven out; and I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame” (iii. 19).

To these miracles the omnipotence of God addresses itself; not to the healing of broken limbs or infirm members of the body, not

to the restoration of sight and hearing and speech only, but to the obliteration of iniquity, to the forgiveness of rebellion, to the restoration of lost souls, will God address the almightiness of his love. The Lord did not build the universe that he might destroy it; wherever there are marks of destruction they are footprints of an enemy; the purpose of the Lord is to obliterate such footprints, to rebuild all shattered strength, to restore all marred beauty; and when the Lord has set himself to work out a purpose, who can withstand the pressure and the progress of his omnipotence? Let all evangelical thinkers and workers, yea, all evangelical men know that they are moving in the line of the divine intent. Let them nourish themselves with the fatness of the divine promises, and be assured that, come what may, the word of the Lord will ultimately prevail.

ANALYSIS OF THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH.

"Chapter i. The utter desolation of Judæa is predicted as a judgment for idolatry and neglect of the Lord, the luxury of the princes, and the violence and deceit of their dependants (3-9). The prosperity, security, and insolence of the people is contrasted with the horrors of the day of wrath, the assaults upon the fenced cities and high towers, and the slaughter of the people (10-18).

"Chapter ii., a call to repentance (1-3), with prediction of the ruin of the cities of the Philistines, and the restoration of the house of Judah after the visitation (4-7). Other enemies of Judah, Moab, Ammon, are threatened with perpetual destruction, Ethiopia with a great slaughter, and Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, with desolation (8-15).

"Chapter iii. The prophet addresses Jerusalem, which he reproves sharply for vice and disobedience, the cruelty of the princes and the treachery of the priests, and for their general disregard of warnings and visitations (1-7). He then concludes with a series of promises—the destruction of the enemies of God's people, the restoration of exiles, the extirpation of the proud and violent, and the permanent peace and blessedness of the poor and afflicted remnant who shall trust in the name of the Lord. These exhortations to rejoicing and exertion are mingled with intimations of a complete manifestation of God's righteousness and love in the restoration of his people (8-20)."—SMITH'S *Dictionary of the Bible*.

HAGGAI.

[NOTE.—“Haggai, one of the twelve minor prophets, and the first of the three who, after the return of the Jews from the Babylonian exile, prophesied in Palestine. Of the place and year of his birth, his descent, and the leading incidents of his life, nothing is known which can be relied on. Some assert that he was born in Babylon, and came to Jerusalem when Cyrus, in the year B.C. 536, allowed the Jews to return to their country (2 Chron. xxxvi. 23; Ezra i. 1), the new colony consisting chiefly of people belonging to the tribes of Judah, Benjamin and Levi, with a few from other tribes. . . . The style of the discourses of Haggai is suitable to their contents: it is pathetic when he exhorts; it is vehement when he reproves; it is somewhat elevated when he treats of future events; and it is not altogether destitute of a poetical colouring, though a prophet of a more vivid imagination would have depicted the splendour of the Second Temple in brighter hues. . . . The prophetic discourses of Haggai are referred to in the Old and New Testaments (Ezra v. 1, vi. 14; Heb. xii. 26. Comp. Hagg. ii. 6, 7, 22).”—KITTO'S *Cyclopædia of Biblical Literature*].

Chapter i.

A PROPHETIC IDYL.

“Then came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet saying” (ver. 3).

HOW did the word of the Lord come to Haggai and through Haggai? The prophet himself tells us in his brief epistle, for an epistle it may be called, seeing that it was delivered so swiftly and directly and overpoweringly to the parties who were addressed by it. Haggai came into the prophetic office late in life. How wonderful is the development of human power! Sometimes there are boy preachers, whom we must always look upon with a kind of gracious distrust. I do not know what the world wants with boy-preachers, but if the Lord chooses to call them and honour them, who are we that we should criticise the way of God? Some are not called to the ministry or the prophetic office until they are well on in life.

God has not been rebuking the men, he has been educating them, chastening and training them, so that although their office be but temporary, of a short duration, yet sympathetically and suggestively it stretches over the whole space of unborn time. You do not know what you may be yet. You are a long time in beginning, but when you do begin who knows how wise will be your ministry, how rich your experience, how tender your spirit? Do not give up all hope, do not count your years; remember the reign and dominion of him who is master and Lord, and constantly say to him, Lord, at thy time, not at mine: if thou dost want me to preach I am ready when thou art ready; if it be better for me not to preach until I am an old man, mighty as Haggai was in grey hairs, so be it: thy will, not mine, be done.

Haggai was only a minister for four months. We are very critical about the duration of ministries now; unless a man has been in his place five years or ten, or two tens, we have unkind remarks to make about the possibility of his not lasting much longer. There are always plenty of malign critics: the world has never been poor in downright wickedness; if wickedness had been wealth all the other stars would have been paupers compared with this earth-millionaire. Four months: what can be done in a little space of time when the whole man works—head, heart, hand, every power, faculty, element of his being, all consecrated with tremendous intensity towards the prosecution and culmination of one sublime and beneficent object! Some men say more in a sentence than others can say in a lifetime. Haggai may have done more in four months than some other man would have done in four centuries. Yet criticism is very foolish, vain, self-magnifying; for the later criticism, sometimes called the “higher criticism,” has found out that the prophecy of Haggai is very tamely written. Criticism cannot come home at night after a whole day’s work and bring nothing with it, it would be ashamed to come back again. There be bold fishermen who go out in the morning with nothing but rod and creel, and come back at night just as empty-handed; but they have had fresh air, enjoyment, and they are ready for refreshment and rest; there is bloom upon the cheek, there is music in the tone. But criticism must bring something back, and criticism has

brought back the report that Haggai has lost much of the old prophetic inspiration, that Haggai, because he began as an old man, has shown an old man's senility in all the writing which he wrote. It is a blessed thing that the prophecy itself is actually before us, so that we can test for ourselves the base insinuation that in Haggai the prophetic torch was almost extinct.

The prophecy of Haggai extends only over some forty verses ; it might be committed to memory. In those forty verses you have little poems that could be elaborated into marvellous epics and idyls. We shall find words in Haggai we can find nowhere else. Every prophet brings his own special offering. Haggai has flowers that no other hand culled, fairer than any that the noblest prophets ever discovered in the garden of God ; but criticism—pale-faced, blear-eyed criticism, with only two sharp teeth in its empty gums—has appeared to tell us that Haggai has lost inspiration, and has nothing to say unique and distinctive. Some witnesses are liars.

“Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, This people ——” (ver. 2).

That is not like the Lord of hosts. “This people”—as if the speaker were pointing, with at least suggestion of contempt, to some motley, nameless, reputeless crowd. In other prophets he has said, even when he was about to rebuke the Church, “My people.” Oh, this contempt of God ! “This people”—not a personal pronoun, but a demonstrative adjective pronoun, an indicative impersonal : “This people,” this crowd, this herd of ingrates. Language ought to be moral. The Lord's language is always deeply steeped in morality. The Lord does not speak anything by way of mere eulogy or panegyric ; the Lord is critical in his judgment : behold the goodness and the severity of God. What do these people say ? “The time is not come.” They might have lived to-day. We have not advanced one inch from this position. It is a position of excuse, evasion, self-protection. Here is no denial of the divine right, not one word is spoken against the house of the Lord, but it is not “time”—to repair the roof, to clean the window, and let the morning light come in ; it is not time to throng into God's sanctuary, and to make it thrill and throb with the music of thankfulness : as who

should say under the sluggard's blankets, By-and-by we will come : to-morrow, or the day following, you will hear our voices ; in a short space we will arise and repair the house, or rebuild the house, or do anything that the house may require to have done to it : in the meantime a little more sleep, a little more slumber, and a folding of the arms and hands together. When is the time coming for you to be a man ? When is the time coming for you to do your first noble deed ? Do not dream that you are going to do something in a few summers' time : when all the children are off your hands, when business anxieties have abated a little, when the rush and competition of life have somewhat subsided, then the Church shall hear your music in song and prayer, and see your sacrifice in labour and in gift. The devil is deceitful ; he does not say to a man, Deny God, pronounce his name as if you hated it. Sometimes he says, There is no need for you positively to deny the existence of God, nor is there any need for you to sneer or show contempt when religious ordinances are referred to ; but you can take up a very strong position if you will say, "The time is not come" : that will be decent, that will be civil ; it will be impossible for the keenest criticism to fasten upon an assertion of that kind, and under cover of that base protestation you can serve hell. Why spend time in metaphysical reasoning with people about these excuses ? Such excuses are not to be metaphysically destroyed ; they are to be burnt out of a man with the fire of heaven.

Is the Lord content with the speech ? Does he say, This is carefully considered : here are prudent persons, they are watching for opportunities, and when opportunities occur they will be faithful ; their activity may be relied upon ; they have not denied the obligation, nor have they wantonly postponed its payment ; they are simply waiting for the right time ? Does the Lord speak so ?—

"Then came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste " (vers. 3, 4).

When did man say, It is not time to make money, it is not time to look after my own interests. It is not time for me to pay the slightest attention to personal wants, or personal com-

forts : all these things can wait ? Never do we house ourselves under gilded roofs without the Lord knowing where we are. Has he not counted every inch of decoration ? Has he not read the estimate of every luxury with which our home is adorned ? Does he not read the garden-bill, the larder-bill, the artist's account ? And do we tell him who has just laid the invoices down that it is not time to attend to the greater house, the larger love, the wider, nobler sacrifice ? Tell it to men who are blind, and deaf, and dumb, and dead, but do not tell it to him who searches the heart, and tries the reins of the children of men. He knows the exact condition of his house. Is this unreasonable ? Is it unreasonable for the husbandman to come to his own field, or garden, or vineyard, and ask concerning the fruit thereof ? Is it unreasonable for the householder to look into the condition of his house ? And the Church is God's house, the temple is the dwelling-place of the Most High ; and if we will not attend to his house, how can he attend to our house ? And will he not presently, after giving us time enough to feel our security, blow the roof off our dwelling-place, and send upon us the storms of an angry heaven ? This is the argument of this prophet—this prophet who is supposed to have lost the prophetic fire.

“Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts ; Consider your ways” (ver. 5).

Set your heart upon your ways ; go into a private position up the mountain, and take the case with you, and turn it over page by page, and let your heart read it. What is the case to which he calls their attention ? It is a case that can be understood by all ; these are the terms :—

“Ye have sown much, and bring in little ; ye eat, but ye have not enough ; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink ; ye clothe you, but there is none warm ; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put into a bag with holes” (ver. 6).

How is this ? What fools you are ! Here you have a process going on under your very eyes : you ought to look into it, and inquire about it, and settle the moral principles of the case : how is it ? This might be a report of our own life to-day. We sow much, we take out whole bags filled with seed, and throw the

seed right and left, from morning till night, and lo, in the harvest what is there but disappointment? Men should ask themselves questions about these things. Of course, there is a high and haughty and noble science that says, These things have nothing whatever to do with Providence. Who says so? Who are these men that talk thus? What have they done for the world? Where are their sacrifices, where are their heroisms, where are their convictions? Where are those elements of life that can compare for one moment with the heroic history of a man like the Apostle Paul? You cannot at the same time have the Bible and deny it. Christians, make your minds upon this point. If you could get rid of the Bible you would have a much freer hand in all controversies—it is the Bible that binds you. For God's sake do not wriggle out of it: shut it up and throw it into the river, then we can understand your action; but do not propose to yourselves both to have the Bible and to disbelieve it; to honour it, and disobey it; and do not pretend to get over the rugged, hard parts evasively, shirkingly: face these parts, for in them is the very test of discipline. The Bible contends that the actions of men are followed by consequences; and it does not scruple to lay down the solemn doctrine that if we dishonour God he will make us feel the result of that dishonour. We cannot scorn his spirit, and steal his harvests. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon. Notwithstanding incidental circumstances that appear to go against this doctrine, this is the teaching of God regarding the great trend of history, regarding the marvellous development and purpose of providence. Thus God calls our attention to physical circumstances, that we may awaken our minds to moral considerations.

“Ye have sown much, and bring in little” (ver. 6).

What is the meaning of that empty hand? What? “Ye eat, but ye have not enough.” How comes it that what you eat goes to nothingness, instead of repeating itself in purer blood, firmer flesh, and thus rising up and flaming into poetry, and thought, and philosophy? How comes it that you stuff the skin that withers under the burden you impose upon it? Why? “Ye clothe you, but there is none warm.” Clothing cannot get near your skin; it is so stiff, so hard, it does but create passages for

cruel draughts. How is this? You have weight, but no warmth; an abundance of things to cover you with, and yet the flesh shivers in the cold. All the Lord asks of us is to think about it, consider it, test this matter in regard to conscience and behaviour. Yet this is the prophet who was supposed to have lost the prophetic fire!

What will the Lord have done? He will create a space for repentance:—

“Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house” (ver. 8).

Get the work done, then the blessing will come. There are some of us who want the blessing without the work, and we cannot have it. You cannot have the harvest without having first the seedtime, and that seedtime may be very cold and harsh, and you may have to face many a morning that is all keenness and coldness. But there is a law—a law of service, a law of action, a law of sequence. The Lord will not allow us to live an irregular life, inventing philosophies for ourselves; we may blow bubbles from the pipe of invention from morning until night, but the earth will not allow one of these bubbles, sun-gilded and beautiful for a moment, to influence its solemn, regular, inexorable, and irresistible action. You must sow the seed when the earth tells you, when the sun tells you; not when you please, but when Nature says, “Now is the accepted time.” And shall we be barriered and caged by law in all these matters, and yet be allowed to lead a fool’s life in relation to things that lay hold upon eternity, and are of the nature of the quality of God?

What will the Lord do when we build the house?

“I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the Lord. Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it [Literally: I did blow it away.] Why? saith the Lord of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste” (vers. 8, 9).

“Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.” The Saviour said, “Wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s house?” In the Authorised Version it is, “about my Father’s business”; but literally it should be, “about my Father’s house.” There must be some

test of obedience, some test of loyalty, and worship, and character ; and if the Lord has appointed this test, it is not for us to vary the scale by which our moral action shall be measured, or the standard by which our moral work shall be estimated. Why was the heaven stayed from, and the earth stayed from her fruit ? Why was there a drought upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the earth bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands ? Why ? The answer is given in plain words : "Because of mine house that is waste." There are those who tell us that potato disease, cattle plague, bad harvest, all natural disappointments have nothing to do with moral spirit, moral discipline, moral behaviour ; the only thing we can reply is this, that we have given ourselves a book called the Bible, which distinctly declares the contrary, and we cannot keep both the book and the doctrine that opposes it. Without saying which is right, here is the eternal verity ; ye cannot have a Bible and no Bible, a God and no God, a Cross and no sacrifice.

NOTE.

"In his first message to the people the prophet denounced the listlessness of the Jews, who dwelt in their 'panelled houses,' while the temple of the Lord was roofless and desolate. The displeasure of God was manifest in the failure of all their efforts for their own gratification. The heavens were 'stayed from dew,' and the earth was 'stayed from her fruit.' They had neglected that which should have been their first care, and reaped the due wages of their selfishness (i. 4-11). The words of the prophet sank deep into the hearts of the people and their leaders. They acknowledged the voice of God speaking by his servant, and obeyed the command. Their obedience was rewarded with the assurance of God's presence (i. 13), and twenty-four days after the building was resumed. A month had scarcely elapsed when the work seems to have slackened, and the enthusiasm of the people abated. The prophet, ever ready to rekindle their zeal, encouraged the flagging spirits of the chiefs with the renewed assurance of God's presence, and the fresh promise that, stately and magnificent as was the temple of their wisest king, the glory of the latter house should be greater than the glory of the former (ii. 3-9). Yet the people were still inactive, and two months afterwards we find him again censuring their sluggishness, which rendered worthless all their ceremonial observances. But the rebuke was accompanied by a repetition of the promise (ii. 10-19)."—SMITH'S *Dictionary of the Bible*.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, as thou hast made us to pray, so do thou teach us how to pray. We know not how to pray as we ought, but thou wilt teach us, if we bring before thee a meek and obedient heart, a waiting and expectant spirit. We know not what we need ; we feel our hunger, but we cannot put it into words : answer thou the hunger that is felt, and not the words that are uttered. We need thy presence every moment, for thou art the Light ; we need to feel thee near, for thou art the soul's security ; we need to feel the touch of thine hand, for in the hand of the Lord is almightiness and all gentleness. Thou knowest the littleness of our life, yet thou canst fill it with sunlight ; thou knowest how poor are our faculties in their outlines and beginnings ; yet thou canst employ them all in useful and holy service. We, therefore, put ourselves into thine hands, O Lord, Maker, Redeemer, Sanctifier of us all. We come to the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, whom we adore as one God. Help us to live and move and have our being in that ineffable unity. May all our thoughts be elevated ; may our expectations be fixed in the heavens ; may we have a holy discontent with everything that is on the earth and that is therefore perishable ; may we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen, for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. Thou hast made us for eternity. Thou hast set within us a great light, thou hast called us by name into all these relations of grace : may we accept the call of God, may we rise in loving and loyal obedience to our Father's voice, and do all the law, and remember all the statutes gratefully and lovingly, and may we obey because of the inspiration of the Cross. For the Cross we bless thee, as for all gifts in one. It is a holy Cross ; it is the way to pardon, to purity, to peace ; it is the creation of God, and the crown of God's creation. We bow down before it, we have no other plea ; we rest in the Son of God. Amen.

Chapter ii.

THE GLORIOUS FUTURE.

"Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory ? and how do ye see it now ? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing ?" (ver. 3).

THE glorious past is never disdained. There ought not to be any past, in the sense of exhaustion or annihilation. The past should be the most vivid and graphic influence in the

present. Because we have seen greatness we shall see glory, should be the tone of every man who undertakes to teach the mysteries of the divine kingdom, and lead the enterprises of the elect and consecrated Church. The house indeed had gone down, in that sense it was nothing in comparison with the house in its first glory. There is a past that humbles the present, that makes the present insignificant and worthless; but the Lord never regards that past as the end of his own opportunity; it is rather the occasion of the beginning of new revelations of his omnipotence. The Lord never stops his kingdom in its darkest hour and says, This is all. The Lord never interrupts a prayer at the point of confession; he listens until the prayer glows with thankfulness, until it becomes violent in sacred ambition, until it would seize the treasures of the kingdom and appropriate them all with a grateful heart; then he says, This is the prayer you meant to pray, and to this prayer I return a grand Amen. It is thus God leads us and educates us. He takes us at our best points, not at our worst. What he sees in us, not what we see in ourselves, is the explanation alike of his discipline and his inspiration. The Lord promised that the house should assume a glory to which the first glory was as nothing. Here is a principle in the divine economy; it is a principle of development, of progress, of gradual and assured consummation. That is a revelation of the providence of God. Men are to become stronger and stronger, the Church is to become purer and purer, the path of the just is to be as a shining light, shining more and more unto the perfect day. What a rebuke is this to our unfaith! We say, What will the world do when certain men are taken away from it? Surely then the world would die if the world were self-created; but, if it were divinely governed, what will God do when he removes the immediate life? Will he say, I can do no more, it does not lie within the range of Almightyness to find another man, thinker, statesman, captain, leader, that can take the place of the one who is about to be removed? Then it would be God who failed, and failure is a term that must never be associated with the name of God.

What will the Church do when this beautiful house is broken up, and the winds howl through the aisles of the sanctuary?

That would be an appropriate question if the sanctuary were a building made by hands; if man conceived, erected, and assured security to the temple, then the days of the temple would be but few, and its end would be a certain catastrophe: but the temple is God's, the Church belongs to heaven. Earth itself is part of the Mother city, colonised afar, and separated from some of its holiest influences by acts of self-apostasy and sin hardly to be conceived or forgiven: yet still the earth is not an islet unrelated to the heavens, it has connections with the mainland, and God will see that the very least of his provinces is cared for. It is not Christianity that speaks of the future with despair; the future is always spoken of by Christian apostles as being more glorious than anything we have yet seen. No man can imagine the light. We say, looking upon a landscape on a cold grey morning, We can imagine what this will be when the sun shines. It is a mistake. No man can imagine the sun. It belongs to light to be an eternal surprise, a daily wonder, a monotony infinitely varied: thus a contradiction in terms, but a fact well known to consciousness and observation. The flowers are surprised by the light as if they had never seen it; they look so gay, they look almost thankful; they seem to say in their beauty, Many a morning have we seen, but never one like this: yesterday was beautiful, but not so beautiful, not so tenderly beautiful as the morning that is now embracing us with its generous welcome. So it is in the development of truth and in the progress of the Church; all the great preaching is yet to come, all the great enterprises are yet to be originated, all the great realisations of God are yet to be experienced. The Son of man in the time of his humiliation saw heaven open, and that is what Christianity is always seeing; wherever there is a closed heaven there is a closed eye. Heaven is always open, and the Son of man is always on the throne, and the angels are always coming and going. Lord, open our eyes that we may see the marvellous economy!

Is there to be no response on the human side? Are men simply in a negative condition? Is our attitude one of supineness? The Lord gives the answer in the fourth verse: "Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel . . . be strong, O Joshua . . . be

strong, all ye people of the land." There is a strength of weakness. The apostle said, "When I am weak then am I strong." Some prayers do more by their feebleness than other prayers can do by their strength or their sacred audacity. We cannot tell what some hymn-singing costs; it is a struggle between the heart and the tongue; the heart is trying to strengthen itself, but the tongue feels that it is called to the task of expressing a strength which is not really felt. Sometimes our psalm-singing is a bitter self-conscious irony; we do not want to sing, we would rather run away into solitude, and cry our hearts out in rivers of tears; yet there comes down upon the soul the appealing voice, "Be strong . . . be strong . . . be strong": now is the opportunity, if you fail now you will never rise again; and when the soul in response to that appeal only flutters, that fluttering is accepted as the flight of strength, as the sacrifice of the accepted amidst the very glory of God. Into these mysteries no soul can enter that has not been long in the school of bitter yet not hopeless experience.

Why have we to be so strong? Is not this mocking what little strength we have? Is not this omnipotence crushing our feebleness? The answer is in the last clause of the fourth verse: "For I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts." That is an answer full of encouragement; that is a rock upon which the Church is built. Any strength that is dissociated from that assurance is not strength at all. It is mere spasmodic weakness; it is an effort that kills itself in the very making of it. We cannot disconnect ourselves from the fountain of eternal strength and long remain mighty men. We do not always account for the momentum which has not yet expended itself, and whilst that momentum continues we are apt to delude ourselves with the impression that because we are in motion the motion is self-originated and self-sustained. You have seen the wheels moving rapidly along the line, and there has been no engine connected with the carriage, but that carriage was connected with the engine, it received its impetus from the engine which is now detached; but that impetus is a dying force, and presently the chariot will stand still. It is even so with men; we have been brought up in religious families, we have received Christian

training, we have been surrounded by Christian influences, and although we may have given up certain Christian persuasions and convictions, we are still able to move, and we boast of that movement as if to say, Behold what we can do without the Cross which we have abandoned. The momentum was received from the Cross ; without the Cross the momentum will die. They are on the line of destruction who have severed themselves from the fountains of eternity. What is our assurance that the latter house will eclipse the glory of the former ? Is it in our eloquence, our learning, our industry, our munificence ? Then indeed our boasting shall come to emptiness, and our protestations shall prove to be falsehoods. What is the secret of our hope ? What is the light of the glory which throws its radiance upon our countenances as we gaze upon time unborn ? The answer is in this same declaration, "For I am with you." When missions fail, God fails ; when Christianity says, I can go no further, this darkness is too great for me to penetrate,—the Cross fails, Calvary proves itself to be a fatal mistake.

"According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you : fear ye not " (ver. 5).

Then no new covenant was written ; it was the old promise. We have no revelations dissociated from the past that have come to us on this very moment. Every promise that speaks to us this day has travelled all the way from eternity to deliver its sweet gospel. The astronomer tells us that the light which we saw but yesterday has been thousands of years on the way ; the beam was shot from the planet five thousand years ago, and only arrived this morning. This is spiritual astronomy. In the Old Testament there are words lying which shot their glorious gospels thousands of years ago, and they did but strike some opening brain this very day, and from that brain they will glance off upon the whole area of the Church, and the Church will say, Behold a new revelation of God ! There is no such novelty ; the novelty is only apparent, it is only in accident or in transient form ; truth can never be older and never be younger ; truth and God are of the same age. The mischief is that we are looking for a new writing, a new covenant, a new bond. We have more than a covenant ; we have a Spirit, and the covenant without the Spirit

would be a dead-letter. Because men have tried to read the Bible without the Spirit, therefore the Bible has been to them a book that has bewildered and confused the intellect that has vainly endeavoured to comprehend its meaning. We do not trust ourselves to the Spirit, the living Holy Ghost; therefore we have lock and bolt under which we keep our orthodoxy; we lock up our deeds in a strong-room, and go to read them to see what it really is we believe—as if a man could keep his faith under lock and key! It has been said by some that guideposts on the mountains are of greatest use to the traveller who never crossed these heights before; so they are. But what is of more use? The living guide, he who walks step for step with the mountaineer and never looks at your painted sign-posts; he has associated with a living soul, a man who knows every inch of the road. Yet there are some persons who cannot keep their misbelieving eyes off the mere whitewashed pole that is called a guidepost. Why will we not believe that the old posts are of no use any more, because the God of the mountains is with us, the Holy Ghost that fashioned the hills has undertaken to conduct us over all the acclivities, and bring us safe to the vale of summer, the city of peace? Every lock that is in the house is a condemnation of society. Why this door-locking and window-fastening? What is going to happen during the darkness of the night? You believe that your privacy may be invaded and your property may be stolen? Then you suspect the very society in which you live, and you are justified in your suspicion. But the Church should be fearless, the Church should not live upon its pennyworth of foolscap; the Church should be identified with the ministry of the Holy Ghost, and if men arise who talk a strange tongue, and who utter themselves in sentences that are at first either obscure or vexatious, we may be sure that in proportion as they have sought the aid of the Holy Ghost, and are willing to submit themselves absolutely to his inspiration, all this momentary eccentricity shall be ruled into the softness and the fluency of a perfect astronomic motion. You cannot keep men right by theological constabulary; the Church is not to be protected by men in uniform; the Church purchased with the blood of the Son of God is promised to be pure, mighty, and glorious, and the God of the promise must consummate his own covenant and declaration. Have

we the Holy Ghost? Do we seek him daily? Do we live upon him?

Now we come again to the divine action; Zerubbabel is to be "strong;" Joshua is to be "strong"; all the people of the land are to be "strong": now the Lord says:—

"I will shake" (ver. 6); "I will shake" (ver. 7):—"I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations."

Here we interrupt the divine action, and say in a pitiful tone of unfaith, See on what troublous times we have fallen; God hath forsaken his people, and the inheritance is given over to the devastations of the wild boar! What foolish talk, what blank atheism! "I," saith the Lord of hosts, "will shake"; the shaking is as clearly a divine action as the birth of peace or the in-bringing of the quiet glory of noontide. Do we suppose that men can shake the heavens and the earth? All they can do is to shake themselves in trying to shake a tree. We behold the tumults of the earth, wars and rumours of wars, and ascribe the great commotion to some action of statecraft. Nothing of the kind; no man can shake a nation; only God can handle the great quantities. We can shake a leaf; we can make a feather feel our tremendous violence, but only God can shake all nations, the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land, and all nations. See God in the controversies of the world; see a divine thought, like a holy sword, rending and smiting and slaying with tremendous and pitiless vengeance.

What is the meaning of it all? "And the desire of all nations shall come" (ver. 7). It would be profitable to collate the Scriptures in which the expression "all nations" occurs: "All nations shall serve him." "All nations shall call him blessed." "Go, teach all nations"—one of the last words of the withdrawing Christ as he lifted up his hands of power and gave the Church his final blessing. There are those who love to find secondary meanings, and fasten attention upon those meanings as if they were all. Thus we refer the seventy-second Psalm to Solomon, and we refer other Psalms or prophecies to David, or to some

mighty king and leader of men ; and here "the desire of all nations" may be some figure in history : but we cannot fill to their utmost capacity these profound passages until we put Christ into them. Often the interpretation comes after the vision ; we do not know what the prophecy means at the time, but two centuries after, two thousand centuries after, the real meaning comes ; then we remember the word of the prophet, how he said, "The desire of all nations shall come." The desire on our part is sometimes unconscious ; we do not know what we are seeking for. There are some unbelievers who do not want to be unbelievers, but who are really struggling after a real, true, saving faith. Sometimes the desire is unexpressed ; yet it touches the whole agony of life, and throws a colour upon the whole experience of progress. We say, What is it that troubles us ? And the answer is, We cannot tell. Why are you not content with time and space and immediate action ? We cannot tell. Why not find in the summer all the heaven you want ? We do not find all the heaven we want even in the fullest summer ; we accept the summer itself as a letter in the literature we are reading, as a tone in the music we can almost overhear. What is this longing of the soul, what is the meaning of this palpitating force that will not rest, but always says, More, more ! Why this ineffable discontent ? It is because we are made in the image and likeness of God, and until we find God, Father, Son, Holy Ghost, the God of providence, the God of salvation, and the God of inspiration and edification, we cannot rest. The light is a mockery to us because we want that other light that pales the sun and constitutes the very glory of heaven.

What will be the end of all this shaking, convulsion, revolution, and the like ? The end is indicated in clear words : "I will fill this house with glory" (ver. 7) ; "In this place will I give peace" (ver. 9). God always gives with both hands : "I will give glory" ; see him making the sun that is to put out all other suns : "I will give peace" ; see him creating the tranquillity beside which all other calmness is foam and tumult. He may give these gifts concurrently, or he may give them separately ; but we are to be assured of the fulfilment of the promise by these gifts only. If we are sitting in the night time, then we have not entered into the

mystery of this prophecy ; we are in fear, tumult, and continual agitation ; then we have not realized the presence of God. There are those who can never be quieted or at all contented unless they be helping God to keep his truth right. So long as they can be busily engaged wearing themselves out in doing nothing, they suppose that God is safe, and the door of eternity is locked top and bottom, and well guarded by blacksmith's bolts. What poor aid is ours ! We say unless we live and write and teach and preach, things will all go wrong. Oh, ye apprentices to the Deity, ye who try to do work for which you seek the admiration of heaven, know ye that God is the builder of his own city, the keeper of his own house, and that not one stone can be touched by fire or by storm, because it is the Lord's building, and he will bring on the topstone with shouting of "Grace, grace unto it !" and he will fill the whole house with glory, as with the very morning of heaven. Whatever we do let us do it quietly, lovingly, simply ; and let us know that we do it by permission, and not by any right arising out of our own capacity or brilliance of gift. It is not in man to buttress the sanctuary of God ; it is not in man to do any mischief to the sanctuary that shall be of a permanent kind. "The Lord of hosts" ; "THE LORD OF HOSTS" ; "THE LORD OF HOSTS" : by this name doth the King ride forth in this chapter. It is a name of significance ; it means not only strength and majesty, it means resource. God's bank has in it gold and silver ; God's arm has in it omnipotence. "Oh, rest in the Lord, wait patiently for him, and he shall give thee thine heart's desire." Not because of our fighting and controversy and anger and tumult, but because of the divine oath, will the whole earth be filled with the glory of God.

Z E C H A R I A H

(B.C. 520-510).

[NOTE.—“Zechariah, the son of Barachiah and grandson of Iddo, was probably of the priestly tribe (see Neh. xii. 4), and returned from Babylon, when quite a youth, with Zerubbabel and Joshua. Whether Iddo was himself a prophet is not clear (compare Hebrew and LXX.). His grandson, Zechariah, began to prophesy about two months after Haggai (i. 1; Ezra v. 1; vi. 14; Hag. i. 1), in the second year of Darius Hystaspes, and continued to prophesy for two years (vii. 1). He had the same general object as Haggai, to encourage and urge the Jews to rebuild the temple. The Jews, we are told, ‘prospered through the prophesying’ (Ez. vi. 14), and in about six years the temple was finished. Zechariah collected his own prophecies (i. 9; ii. 2), and is very frequently quoted in the New Testament. Indeed, next to Isaiah, Zechariah has the most frequent allusions to the character and coming of our Lord. The genuineness of the closing chapters ix.-xiv. has been doubted. Mede and others refer them to Jeremiah, deeming the reading in Matt. xxvii. 9, 10, and internal evidence, in favour of this view. Jahn, Blayney, Hengstenberg, and others, refer the whole to Zechariah, and suppose the reading to be, as it easily might be, an error of copyists. While the immediate object of Zechariah was to encourage the Jews in the restoration of public worship, he has other objects more remote and important. His prophecies, like those of Daniel, extend to the ‘the times of the Gentiles’; but in Zechariah the history of the chosen people occupies the centre of his predictions; and that history is set forth both in direct prophecy and in symbolical acts or visions. . . . It may be added, that, in the version of the LXX., several Psalms are ascribed to Haggai and Zechariah (cxxxviii., cxlvi.-cxlviii.); and though nothing can be decided with certainty as to these particular Psalms, it is highly probable that both prophets were concerned in the composition of some of those which were produced after the return from captivity.”—ANGUS’S *Bible Handbook*.]

Chapter i. 1-9.

SPIRITUAL TIMES AND SEASONS.

WE dislike men who know the day upon which they were converted. We have lived, by the temptation of the devil, down to that low point. Our reason for disliking such

men is that we do not know the day of our own conversion ; and if we do not know when we were converted, how is it possible for any one else to know when he was converted ? All the prophets must go down before this narrow and shallow criticism of ours, because they give the day and the date, and almost the very hour. The difficulty is for a man to forget the day when he first saw the Lord. Why, there is no other day. All the so-called other days are so many nights, or at best twilights. We never saw the true day until we saw the light that is above the brightness of the sun ; this day puts out all other light, this incident of conversion puts out all other history, or throws it into its right perspective and relationship. Zechariah was a youth. That is a term which ought to be explained, because it conveyed a meaning in the Hebr w which it does not convey in English. A " youth " does not necessarily mean a child or a boy. Jeremiah said he was a child, " a little child." So are we all in the presence of a century : what must we be in the presence of eternity ? Joseph was called a child, or a youth, when he was twenty-eight years of age ; the men who mocked Elisha were called little children : they may have been forty years old. All these terms are relative, and are not to be understood except by a clear conception of the circumstances under which they were used. The Lord chooseth both old men and young ; his message will fit any age : sometimes he has a word to us that a boy could not utter ; sometimes he has a message to deliver that only a young heart can properly announce, because it alone has the requisite freshness of sympathy and music. The Lord has a word which only men of business can speak ; and they will not speak it. There are some sermons that ought never to be preached in the pulpit ; they ought to be preached in the market-place, or over the counter, or on high 'Change ; and men of business only can speak them with clearness and precision, and moral, because personal, authority. There are some texts that preachers have no business with ; they cannot pronounce the words aright ; they can utter the individual syllables, but they cannot run them into that persuasive music which belongs only to the tongue of honest commerce.

" The prophet " (ver. 1). Zechariah is not ashamed of his

function. We are not to read "the son of Iddo the prophet," according to English punctuation; the comma ought to be after the word "Iddo"; and, omitting the intermediate genealogy, the word will then stand—"The word of the Lord unto Zechariah the prophet." How can the Lord send his word to anybody but prophets? Other people could not understand it. Here is a mystery, but it is a mystery of fact rather than of speculation or dream. Some men laugh at the Gospel. Do not mock them; they cannot do aught else. Why I cannot tell, I did not make the universe; the human heart is no construction of ours. There are men to whom there is no Church. Do not reason with them; you cannot put liquid into a vessel that is open at both ends; do not waste your words: the kingdom of heaven is sent to them who can understand it, feel it, catch its music, and answer it with kindred melody. All this involves much questioning; all this indeed supplies the basis upon which angry cross-examination might take place; and we know it. The explanation may come by-and-by, and that explanation will be adequate; meanwhile, there are men to whom sermons cannot be preached because they cannot be heard. There are souls on whom hymns are wasted. How this is we know not.

When the Lord sends his word to his chosen one he will make it easy for that chosen one to deliver it, will he not? No: he sends his servant upon hard work. When did the Lord ever give any servant of his an easy function? When did he say to his Jeremiah, or Ezekiel, or Daniel, or other prophets, Come now; this is easy, this will cost you nothing; you could do this at odd times? Never. There are men who can apparently do the Lord's work without suffering through it; but it is not the Lord's work they are doing, or if it be the Lord's work in any superficial sense it is not done with the Lord's spirit, which is the spirit of the Cross, the spirit of shed blood, the spirit that keeps nothing back. There be those who say that the Lord deceived us by going into a swoon. A poor Lord to follow and unworthy of being followed! If he only swooned in love he is a deceiver. All who teach that dead Christ who lived again must be prepared to carry heavy weights, and run long distances, and say words that scorch their tongues.

Zechariah was commissioned to say to the people, "The Lord hath been sore displeased with your fathers." "Sore displeased" is somewhat feeble. Yet it is significant. The word which Zechariah really used was, "The Lord hath been wrath with a wrath." Real Hebrew, word upon word, with cumulativeness of emphasis until repetition becomes argument, and reduplication becomes eloquence. The details are left to the imagination. Who will set down the Lord's judgment in numbered particulars? He who would do so would trifle with all the higher aspects and meanings of providence. When all heaven is draped with one cloud of anger, where is the man who would take paper and pen and write thereon the detail of the wrath of God? Take it in its summariness; take it in its unbroken unity.

But being "displeased with your fathers," what is that to do with us? Let Darwin himself be commentator. Darwin says, "No being can ever get rid of its antecedents." If the Bible had said that, we might have smiled at the fanaticism, and charged the book with a species of immorality, because it follows men from age to age, and says, You!—the man who was not in Eden when the fruit was stolen. Darwin says he was, and Darwin was a prophet. That is to say, if ever there was a man who did anything wrong, all men belonging to that man can never shake him off. Have we sufficiently considered the solidarity of history? Do we really know that there is only one Man in the world? Not one individual, or not one man, spelling man with a small m: but only one Man. So we recur to our question, Where are those who separate themselves from humanity, and shelter themselves under the canvas of their ancestral respectability? It is well for the theologians that they can quote Charles Darwin, because Zechariah is of no account. Only a man who has collected ten thousand insects and pinned five thousand butterflies, and studied night and day the minutest processes of nature accessible to the microscope or the telescope,—only he may now be believed. Zechariah had no telescope—poor Zechariah! "Your fathers": what have we to do with our fathers? Everything. Did you object to being made rich by your father? When do you want to cast your fathers off?

When you can get no more out of them : but Darwin says a man, a creature, cannot get rid of his antecedents—and Darwin had a microscope ! We are thankful for such testimony ; it is the testimony of patience, intelligence, and fearlessness, and ought to be valued by every student of human nature.

But there is another factor in the universe that does not come within the ken of the microscope :—“Therefore say thou unto them, Thus saith the Lord of hosts.” That is religious. If there is a Lord of hosts, that makes all the difference in the universe. Of course, I had thought before I came to this that the universe got into existence in some kind of surreptitious manner ; I did not know how it stole in upon me, or where I was when it came into existence, but I have been given to understand that it made itself in some kind of way, or came out of something so minute that nobody ever saw it, and nobody ever remembers its exact name ; it came out of particle, or atom, or mist, or fire-vapour, or cloud. Perhaps : but where did the thing it came out of come from ? That is what we want to know. If you start with an atom, we only ask where the atom came from. It is going to be a greater mystery than we at first supposed ; a grander display of power, a more august, tremendous wisdom. Hear the new name—“The Lord of hosts” : is there a power outside of us that rules us, directs us, on the ground of having made us ? If so, that makes all the difference in the argument. If we are not alone in creation, who is it that divides and spoils our solitude ? The Lord of hosts is unthinkable. So is everything under the sun and above it, in its higher, deeper, grander meanings. Zechariah does not deliver any message of malediction or of benediction as the result of his own inspiration, or any movement on his own part. Whatever he says he sanctifies by a name ; that name is “the Lord of hosts,” and Zechariah believed that the universe was made all the more possible and beautiful and useful, because it was created by the Lord of hosts. We accept his doctrine ; it looks to us more rational than any other.

What will the Lord of hosts have done ? He will have a gospel proclaimed, and that gospel shall be the great doctrine of the possibility of human conversion—“Turn ye unto him.”

That is the word that makes highest history. Here you have an action proceeding in one direction, and a voice says, Reverse, halt, turn, come back! That is a new possibility in life, we never thought of that before. We understood that if a motion was created, it must go on through eternity; but here is a power that says, Whatever is going on one way can go back the other way. There is a voice, rational or irrational, that says, Whatever we do can be undone, if we associate ourselves with an economy larger than the world which we call the world of nature. "Be not as your fathers." What, is it possible to shake off your antecedents? Is it possible to be grafted into another tree? Is it possible to start a new history? What? Listen—"If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." Here, then, we have conversion, reconstruction, regeneration, sanctification.

In the fifth verse we have an extraordinary colloquy: "Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever?" How many pensive sermons we have heard preached on these inquiries that have no relation whatever to the question, except a relation of accommodation! The colloquy is between the prophet and the people:—Your fathers, where are they? saith the prophet,—dead, gone, perished, crushed beneath the wheel of righteous retribution: your fathers, where are they? And the people answered—Well, what of it? the prophets, do they live for ever? If our fathers were bad men and are dead, the prophets you say were good men, and are they alive? The prophets, do they live for ever? And so the colloquy proceeds—a colloquy of angry exhortation on the one side, and angry and scornful recrimination on the other. Zechariah says, Your fathers are dead,—and the people say, So are your prophets. The hearers are dead, so are the preachers. This power of reproach, this genius of recrimination, must be carefully watched. There is a law of dissolution, as well as a law of penalty. The prophet was not speaking about the mere dissolution of the fathers, as who should say, Even the wisest men are mortal. He was pointing to their removal as a proof of the righteous retribution which governs human affairs. As for the prophets, when they die, they die by a natural process, and pass on to a higher development; in so far as they were good men they never die.

Zechariah is not dead; David the sweet singer is not dead; Mary the mother of Jesus is not a dead woman; the Saviour lives for ever.

Zechariah is not only empowered to deliver a message, he is authorised to found all his messages and expostulations upon his own personal experience. Unless a theologian is a converted man, and has a testimony of his own about Christ, he is an invader of the sanctuary, he is a trespasser, though a preacher.

Now Zechariah speaks in his own person, saying, "I saw by night." What an extraordinary combination of terms! It is all some men can do to see by day; they can only see dim outlines; they do not see realities, they see images, types, and symbols; the prophet says, "I saw by night," which is in reality the only true time for seeing. If you want to see your dead friends, look for them at midnight: all the lights out, all the curtains drawn, the room all darkness; then, hush! they come. Another man may say, I never saw. Very good; what of it? Who ever charged you with having seen anything? Because you do not see, was Zechariah blind? Because you have never seen anything under your feet but the paving-stones, have other men not seen flowers? Who made thee a ruler or a judge of other men's power of insight and penetration? Zechariah says he saw, and he saw by night, and he saw "a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle trees that were in the bottom; and behind him were there red horses, speckled, and white." It is easy to sneer at these visions; the sneer is a tribute. Men by sneering show the limit of their own capacity, and the limit of their own influence. Zechariah saw. Some living men are always seeing, and are always being mocked. That must be so. Have no fear of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do: cultivate the spiritual faculty, encourage, so to say, your spiritual vision to look for more and more light and beauty. Some of us do live more in the spiritual than in the so-called material. When men ask me if I believe in the supernatural, I say, No: there is no supernatural. Why? Because what you call nature is not nature in any limited, sensuous,

and superficial sense: there is nothing but supernatural. We deny the etymology and the exactness of the term; "Super"—that is the part of the word we cast away, and we say, All creation, all matter, all souls, live on the appointed level, and God is in all, and above all, and round about all. We do not admit the distinction between nature and supernature; we find the standard of judgment in God's personality. Men see different things in the world, and they must interpret their own symbols or get them interpreted. We never saw a man riding upon a red horse, and standing among the myrtle trees; but he is always there; it is the eye that is wanted, not the man. "Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw." That is the sublime mystery of development.

"And the angel that talked with me." That is poor, but the literal rendering is grand—"And the angel that talked in me." That is it. The interpreter must always be in a man,—*"The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."* Listen to your soul, listen to yourself, listen to yourself when you are in your best moods, when the keys of heaven are given to you, and the Lord says, Ask what thou wilt, and it shall be done unto thee. Then seize the crown, and hold it with a faithful hand.

CHAPTER I.

“HANDFULS OF PURPOSE” FOR ALL GLEANERS.

“Be not as your fathers” (ver. 4).

THIS is an inversion of a common exhortation. We are often counselled to keep in our fathers' way, and attend to our fathers' word, and reflect our fathers' example; but in this case we are to turn away from our fathers as from our enemies.—The fact that such a command is given shows that obedience to it is possible; if that is the case, here is a most remarkable instance of men separating themselves from their antecedents.—Science teaches us that no man can get away from his antecedents; but Scripture insists that such a detachment is possible, and indeed is requisite for entrance into the kingdom of heaven.—Nature allowed to go on in its uninterrupted course would possibly prove the scientific position; but we are not only in an economy of nature, we are also in an economy of grace or of distinct spiritual action; the God who created nature has also committed himself to certain spiritual ministries, the end of which is new creatureship.—Let some who have had bad fathers be encouraged by this exhortation; let those who have had good fathers follow in good ways; but let no man's heart be cast down simply because he started from a bad human origin.—History is full of instances in which the children of bad parents have become conspicuous Christians.—Do not quote the authority of bad men simply because they happen to be your fathers.—It is possible for a youth to say that by following an evil course he is only doing what his father did; that is no excuse; certainly it is no reason, and he knows in his own heart that it is a vain and hollow plea.

“We have walked to and fro through the earth, and, behold, all the earth sitteth still, and is at rest” (ver. 11).

Yet there was no image visible to the eye of the body.—We cannot tell under what inspection we live; but it is a solemn fact that we do live under spiritual scrutiny.—The condition of the earth is reported in heaven day by day.—Not that God, who is omniscient, needs any such report, but that his whole universe is constructed upon the principle of supervision, criticism, and final judgment.—By sending out spirits or human intelligences to make moral surveys, he educated the very messengers whom he thus commissions.—The earth was meant to be still, to be at rest, to feel upon it the benediction of Sabbath day.—How different from this is the real state of the world as we know it!—How is rest to be restored?—How can the Sabbath be made

to dawn upon this battlefield?—The angels could but report the condition of the world, they could not mend it.—Ministers of Christ can not only report the condition of the world, but by exercising their function they can instrumentally not only amend, but educate and redeem the world.—We should accustom ourselves to an exact survey of things as they are.—Never shut our eyes to facts.—Let us face the reality of the case, however bad it may be, for only by doing so can we get at the root of things, and apply vital remedies.—Wonderful is the picture of the recording angel; the Book is spread before him; swiftly his hand writes down all the incidents of time; then the Book is handed to the Lord, who is the Judge of all the earth. It is under such an economy we live.—Let every man say of himself, “Thou God seest me.”—This criticism is not meant to alarm us, but to encourage us, if so be we walk in the ways of truth and righteousness.—Only the bad man has any reason to fear the scheme of creation.—That scheme is made so as to burn all bad men and bad thoughts; but it is made so as to encourage everything that is true, lovely, and of good report.

“I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies” (ver. 16).

What should we expect from an announcement of this kind?—We should probably expect that the Lord would lull the people into peace and a sense of security; would indeed cover them with the feeling of a certain degree of sleep, in which they would see everything as in the haze of dreams, and see nothing in its ruggedness and baldness.—What the Lord means by coming to a city with mercies is explained by the following sentence—“My house shall be built in it.”—The mercy is not a mere sentiment.—We do not live upon the foam of words or the bubbles of speculation.—No mind is right, or at rest, or in the true line of progress, that has not the sanctuary for its very centre and for its chief ornament and glory.—The men who undervalue the sanctuary do not know the injury they are inflicting upon society.—Prayer has always been undervalued or misunderstood probably by the bulk of mankind.—Wherever the sanctuary is assailed, its friends should the more generously and strenuously support it.—That is always the best way of answering the enemy or the assailant.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we bless thee for all we have heard of thy kingdom ; for we rejoice that we have heard that it is a kingdom of God, a kingdom of heaven, a kingdom of truth and light and peace. It is an eternal kingdom, yet every phase of it is new ; thou dost surprise us with beauty, thou dost quicken our amazement by startling revelations, thou dost cause all history to shape itself into parable, and all providence to become a question and an enigma, that through these our attention may be excited and may be riveted and may be satisfied with answers divine. Pity us in our littlenesses : thou knowest what we would be if we could ; thou knowest our supreme desire ; our uppermost thought is known to thee, whether it be a thought debased by selfishness, or ennobled by some yet unspoken prayer that will one day ask at the Cross great things of God. We thank thee for all hints that this is not our resting-place ; we bless thee for all suggestions of a great Beyond, where trial shall be at an end, where weeping shall be unknown, where fellowship shall be unbroken. May we be drawn on as by the power of an endless life, a glorious, holy, ennobling constraint, captivity to which is truest liberty. Be with us in all our life, in our houses, and in our businesses, in the chamber of festival, in the chamber of sickness ; be with us when all life is one buoyant gladness ; be with us still nearer and more tenderly when life is one great gloom. When all these transient phases have passed away may we see the meaning of them all in the face of Jesus Christ, no more a Lamb slain, but for ever a reigning King. Amen.

Chapter ii.

THE SPIRITUAL JERUSALEM.

THE prophet Zechariah is so apocalyptic in his way of seeing everything, and stating what he does see, that it is next to impossible to give a final literal interpretation of his prophecy. His book in the Old Testament takes some such place as the revelation of John the Divine in the New Testament. It should always be remembered that apocalyptic writing cannot be literally interpreted, and therefore readers should be very careful how they build large and judicial doctrines on texts of very doubtful purport. With this understanding we may look at the weird and pictorial words of Zechariah in the hope of being able

here and there to see something that may help our better life. It is worse than folly to attempt to literalise such writing as Zechariah's. There is, of course, a strong temptation to some minds to do this; but experience has shown that such labour is generally, if not universally, fruitless—not fruitless only indeed, but leading to angry and clamorous controversy which never can be settled to the satisfaction of the disputants.

Zechariah lifted up his eyes again, and looked (ver. 1): that is about all that is possible to any man. Zechariah puts himself into an attentive and receptive relation, and there our duty begins and ends, so far as receiving messages from heaven is concerned; afterwards we have to go out and carry these messages into effect; at the first, all we can do is to lift up our eyes in expectancy, and look as if inspired by an assured hope. This must be our way of treating the Bible. We do not see everything in one look; we have to look again and again. Jesus Christ did not quote the Scriptures once for all when he contended with his enemy in the wilderness; he told that enemy that it was “written again.” Every new day has some new vision of God for the soul that longs to see divinest beauty. All the old things will bear looking at again. The sunset is never old in any sense of exhaustion, of suggestion, beauty, and glory. The tiniest flower that blooms in spring or summer will bear looking at again and again, and will always have some new aspect of loveliness to show to us, if our eyes be directed to it with expectancy. How true this is of the whole scheme of divine providence! Read the days as they pass, and see how swiftly God is writing the story of human life and the revelation of his ineffable purpose! All this writing is done in daily business, in general strife, in the clash of arms, in the emulation of empires, and in all the affairs and elements that constitute human progress. We should see more if we looked with more eagerness. Only to the open eye will God show himself. Nor is that the eye of the body, it is the eye of the heart. Yea, blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Zechariah saw “a man with a measuring line in his hand” (ver. 1). Surely this may be taken as a sign of judgment!

When God brings men to the standard, he means either to approve or condemn them. So when God lays the measuring line upon a city and upon a life, surely his purpose is to find out its defects, and to judge accordingly. Ezekiel saw this same angel. Various prophets have referred to the same mystic messenger as operating energetically in vision and in action. We may see him to-day if we look for him. The angels are not dead; we have concealed them within the clouds of our unbelief, or fear, or selfishness, but the clouds are purely of our own creation, and they do not affect the reality of spiritual existences. In this verse the angel declared his purpose, which was "To measure Jerusalem, to see what is the breadth thereof, and what is the length thereof." Whilst this conversation was proceeding between Zechariah and the angel, "another angel went out to meet him," and would appear to have delivered the precise message which Zechariah was intended to hear, namely, "Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein." It is important to notice the architectural outline of this Jerusalem, because it suggests that it cannot be the earthly Jerusalem that is meant. To be without walls, was in ancient times and places to be without defence; to have no wall, was to be a continual temptation to surrounding peoples. So long as Jerusalem was without a wall, her life was one of constant and humiliating fear. The period of her restoration and security was indicated by the building. It had been promised to Daniel that her "street shall be built again, and the wall, even in strait times." Nearly five hundred years before the coming of Christ Nehemiah mourned, saying, "The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province, are in great affliction and reproach, the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire." It would appear, therefore, that the prophecy looks forward to the times of Christ. He was to have a Jerusalem not limited and bounded by walls and fences and landmarks; his city was to be without any such boundaries, and was to gradually expand on the right hand and on the left, until the whole world should become the city of God. "Thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down; not one of the stakes thereof shall ever be removed, neither shall

any of the cords thereof be broken." This would seem to refer to limitation, but the prophet proceeds, "Spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; for thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left."

Is the spiritual Jerusalem to be a city without a wall of defence? Is it to be the prey of the enemy? Is it to live a life of continual exposure? The answer is given in verse 5:—

"For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her."

These firewalls escape the attention of our poor vision. We think the Church is not safe unless we build up walls of creed, and dogma, and ceremony, and all manner of mechanical arrangements; we seem to be determined not to leave any room for divine providence in the economy and progress of the Church. Be it known unto us, one and all, to meddlers of every class and kind, that the Lord himself is a wall of fire round about his Church. Elisha prayed that the young man's eyes might be opened, and no sooner were they opened than he beheld this same wall of fire. We are also inclined to create minor glories and grandeurs in the Church; we have our hierarchies, our gradations from the highest to the lowest, our appointments of a ceremonial and ritual kind; our great men, our fertile writers, our keen debaters, our brilliant assailants of error, and our magnificent defenders of positive truth; all these in their right places may be of much use, but we must remember what God says in this same verse—that he "will be the glory in the midst of her." Similar words are found in the prophecy of Isaiah, "The Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory." Of Christ we read prophetically: "In that day shall the branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious" to the "escaped of Israel."

"Ho, ho, come forth, and flee from the land of the north, saith the Lord; for I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heaven, saith the Lord" (ver. 6).

The Lord having founded a city of defence, calls all his people to it. They have not to build one Babylon to oppose another; with their own hands they have to create no defence; they have simply to come to the city of God: "Go ye forth of Babylon, flee

ye from the Chaldeans, with a voice of singing declare ye, tell this, utter it even to the end of the earth ; say ye, The Lord hath redeemed his servant Jacob." The music of Jeremiah is in the same lofty and thrilling key : "Flee out of the midst of Babylon, and deliver every man his soul : be not cut off in her iniquity ; for this is the time of the Lord's vengeance ; he will render unto her a recompense." At all times the command of the Lord is to flee and deliver ourselves from opposing forces. We are never told merely to flee, as if to outrun the enemy ; we are always invited to some particular goal, some divinely-built and divinely-protected Jerusalem. The sinner is not commanded to flee away from his sin ; he is commanded to flee to his Saviour. The same doctrine is laid down in divers directions, but it always indicates the specialty of God's provision for those who flee from evil. "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing"—this is negative, this is simply to call up the soul to some perilous adventure, the soul not knowing the issue of its endeavours, but the promise follows the command—"and I will receive you." So commands and promises roll together in these marvellous communications from heaven.

"For he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye" (ver. 8).

The Old Testament is full of the most endearing expressions regarding the relation of God to his Church. It would be easy to show that there is more real tenderness in the Old Testament than in the New so far as the expression of sentiment is concerned. The one thing that invests the New Testament with supreme tenderness is the Cross of Christ : in presence of that spectacle all other tenderness becomes but a variety of cruelty. No man can touch the saint without first touching the Saviour. The glory of the Lord is round about the humblest of his people ; so that he who would smite the obscurest worshipper must force his way as through a circle of guardian fire. What can be closer in the way of relation than that which is expressed by the image before us ? Precious in the sight of the Lord is the life of the saints, the whole course of their conduct, and precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints. It would seem as if the Lord saw nothing but the saints, because all his arrangements

are made with a view to their culture, their edification, and their final and eternal fellowship with himself. Does not the image teach us that God's people seem to be part of God himself? Can any man remove the pupil of his eye without losing his sight, and thus inflicting injury upon his whole constitution? We are partakers of the divine nature, if so be our life is hidden with Christ in God. Know ye not that your bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost, and the Holy Ghost dwelleth in you? Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: not something outside God, but something partaking of his very nature, something identified with his very deity. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church.

"Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord. And many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day, and shall be my people: and I will dwell in the midst of thee, and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto thee" (vers. 10, 11).

It is impossible that the Church should keep a silent tongue amid the shower of blessings poured out from heaven upon the inheritance of the Lord. We are called upon to sing and rejoice, and shout and clap our hands, and enter into all possible manifestations of exultant delight. We cannot arrange for such experiences, saying that to-day or to-morrow we will hold high festival in the Church of God. There are times when the soul is filled with such a sense of the divine presence and glory that it must break forth into singing, and betake itself to demonstrations which, to the carnal mind, must seem not only eccentric, but wild and irrational. The soul must know the secret of its own gladness, and fully respond to all the indications of the divine pleasure. A silent church is an ungrateful church. A silent family is a family that represents unthankfulness and impiety. A silent life gives no testimony to the indwelling and all-ruling presence and energy of the Holy Spirit.

The promise that many nations shall join themselves to the Lord in that day, and shall become the people of the Lord, is a grand evangelical prophecy. Isaiah had looked forward to the time when proselytes in considerable numbers should join the

true Israel. Jeremiah also had predicted something of the same consummation. They, however, seem to have limited their vision in some directions, but Zechariah now takes up the prophecy, and says that many nations shall join themselves. The Jews had made no converts among the heathen; the Jews had been scattered everywhere, and yet the nations had not allied themselves with the great Jewish current of history and development; but now comes the prophecy that many nations shall join themselves unto the Lord. From eternity this has been the thought of God. We are nowhere taught that God had fixed his love upon one particular nation to the exclusion of all other peoples. Even God must begin at some historical point, and he began with a people of his own special creation, but he only began with that people, that he might add to it all the other peoples of the earth until the whole world should be filled with his glory. The title of Israel was "the people of God," or, in other words, "A people unto himself." The heathen were represented as "not a people," and God purposed to provoke Israel to jealousy by these outlying nations. Israel was very dear unto the Lord, not because of good behaviour, but because of his own purpose and grace. The figure which Jeremiah employs indicates the utmost closeness: "As a girdle cleaveth to the loins of a man, so have I caused to cleave unto me the whole house of Israel, and the whole house of Judah, saith the Lord; that they might be unto me for a people and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory." This was not to be the exclusive and final privilege of Israel; but to these enjoyments many nations were to be admitted. Thus Christ is to see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied. The Church of God is to consist of Israel and the Gentiles. The unity of humanity is realised and acknowledged in the Son of man.

In the twelfth verse we come upon an expression which has often been unduly limited, namely, "the holy land." The verse reads, "And the Lord shall inherit Judah his portion in the holy land, and shall choose Jerusalem again." The land was made holy by the presence of God. It is not land separate from all the other portion of the earth, and technically described as "holy." Wherever God is there is holiness. The whole earth

is to be filled with the knowledge of God, then the whole earth will be the holy land. Let us understand, therefore, that we are not dealing in this verse with a merely technical expression. We are looking forward to a time when the whole earth shall be God's Palestine. Happily we are not to think of the conversion of the heathen as something independent of the purpose of God in the general administration of earthly affairs. Even when the whole world is converted, it would appear as if Jerusalem should be the centre of the new empire. It is true that repentance and remission of sins are to be preached among all nations : the beginning was to be made in Jerusalem.

When, in the thirteenth verse, we find the exclamation, "Be silent, O all flesh, before the Lord," the literal word is "Hush!" The whole human race is to have nothing to say to God, is not to argue with God, has no part or lot in any equal controversy with God : the duty and the privilege of the earth is to be silent when the Lord raises himself out of his holy habitation and speaks to the creatures of his hand. According to the thirteenth verse there is a time when God seems to be perfectly indifferent to the affairs of life. It would appear, indeed, as if the Divine Being were in slumber, for we read of his being "raised up." These, however, are but accommodations of language to human weakness and usage. For ever and ever the eyes of the Lord are open, and the heart of the Lord is filled with solicitude towards his creation.

Chapter iii.

THE "BRANCH" PROMISED.

THE next vision that came before the prophet Zechariah is that of "Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him" (ver. 1). We are to understand by the pronoun in this verse God, and to read thus: And God showed me Joshua the high priest. The prophet was attended by an angel; it is important to notice the function of that angel, and to remember that it was limited to the explanation, and not to the revelation of the visions. God himself is the revealer of vision, the source of all true dream and imagination; all that even angels can do is of the nature of explanation. This is particularly true even of the Christian ministry. Ministers do not invent their facts, or formulate their own doctrines, or originate their own ideas of redemption and sanctification. In proportion as they are true and faithful ministers they will go to the Bible itself to see what God has shown the human family, and will ask of God power to explain the vision to those who wonder as to its meaning. Joshua the high priest must be regarded here as standing representatively when we read of him that he was "clothed with filthy garments." The picture of Joshua and the angel is one of vivid and impressive contrast; the one was a priestly man representing all the iniquity of his people, and the other was the radiant angel, typifying in a limited degree the holiness and beauty of God. A remarkable incident is that of Satan standing at the right hand of the high priest to resist him, or to be his adversary. These things are an allegory. We can understand them better by looking at the painful facts of our own experience. We cannot account for it, but we are bound to acknowledge that there are in life two wholly different personalities or ministries; we may even call them influences, and still we shall not lose the effect of the appalling

and instructive doctrine. Satan is always standing at the right hand of the good man. For some purpose of education, which lies now completely beyond our apprehension, it would seem to be needful that the devil should accompany us throughout the whole journey of life. The consolatory reflection is that this hated companion, this hated shadow, is continually under the rebuke of God.

"The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee" (ver. 2).

Yet the enemy is not destroyed. We are bound, therefore, upon a large survey of divine thought and action, to believe that this evil shadow, this tormenting presence, this desolating ministry, is in some sense part of the agency created and controlled by God for the full development of human nature. We must either look upon Satan as an accident, or as an appointment; if as an accident, it would seem to charge God with some measure of weakness or inability; if as an appointment, though we cannot escape the suggestion of mystery, yet we are able to see in that mystery the concealment of the highest beneficence.

The filthy garments with which Joshua was clothed were but for a time. The angel said :—

"Take away the filthy garments from him, and unto Joshua he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment" (ver. 4).

Here is the great action of pardon. It does not lie within human power to forgive in any but a most superficial sense; with God alone is the prerogative of forgiveness. The Lord said unto David, by the mouth of the prophet Nathan, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin." When the high priest is clothed with raiment of glory and beauty, he represents the ideal state of the Church. Unless we are filled with ideals, and especially with the ideal of Christ, it will be impossible for us to save ourselves from the enfeebling and corrupting influence of fear. Let us keep our eyes therefore upon the High Priest, even upon Christ. "He is clothed with the glory of God"; as he is, so are we to be, though at present we are conscious

of guilt within and without. What we are in reality, we may see by looking upon Christ in the days of his humiliation, when he who knew no sin was made sin for us, when he took upon him our iniquities and carried our sins, and was clothed with all the filthiness of our corruptness. In both aspects Christ is to be regarded as purely priestly or typical: in the one case, we see what we are; in the other case, we see what we may be.

In the eighth verse we come upon the familiar title of the Branch, "I will bring forth my servant the *BRANCH*." Isaiah had said, "In that day shall the branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious for the escaped of Israel." Again: "There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots." Jeremiah exclaims, "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch. . . . In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David, and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land." As the branch proceeds from the vine, so the Son proceeds from the Father. By that sovereignty of action which is characteristic of the Divine Being, Jesus Christ changed the relation when speaking to his disciples, and called himself the Vine, and the disciples the branches. The change is only one of metaphor, it is not one of reality. Christ is both root and stem, both vine and branch; yet he who called himself the Light of the world was not ashamed to look upon his disciples, and describe them in their ideal relations as being themselves the light of the world.

The stone spoken of in the ninth verse it is impossible fully to explain: the stone is one, but upon the one stone is seven eyes, and the stone is filled with engraving, done by the very hand of God himself. It has pleased God often to use the image of the stone; he laid in Sion a stone, elect, precious, tried. Jesus Christ was the stone of stumbling and the rock of offence. Jesus Christ as the living Stone is imaged before us as One who is gifted with omniscience; he has "seven eyes," indicative of the fact that he looks everywhere through all space and upon all circumstances. This may be regarded as an element of terror, for all things must be naked and open unto his vision. On the

other hand, it is an element and an assurance of the highest joy, for whatever we do that is good will be seen as certainly as every action that is evil. Who can read the graving that is engraved upon this living Stone? Who can fully read all the meaning of God's beloved Son? There is always more to be read, more ground of mystery to be covered, more music of eternity to be heard and answered. Who can read the graving of the wounds, on the right hand and on the left, and on the feet, and on the temples, and in the side? Behold this graving is done in blood, and every red stain hides some mystery of love.

In the ninth verse we are further told that God "will remove the iniquity of that land in one day." We wonder sometimes how God can find opportunity for the accomplishment of all his miracles. We forget that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. That which is sudden to us is not sudden to him. In eternity he prepared for time. Everything comes with measure, with due relation, and is in the nature of musical action; all the processes of Providence are rhythmic and harmonious. What pregnant days there are to be upon the earth! How much is to be done between the rising and the setting sun! But all this means large preparation, careful introduction, and balancing of all manner of contrary and conflicting elements. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, God shall consummate his miracles, and make the heavens and the earth new in beauty and in glory. We are not to trust to these great days of miracle, saying, Whatever we be or do, all will be well when the Lord arises to cleanse the earth. The detail is being done now. Now, whilst we breathe over this page, stone is being brought to stone in the individual and in the national life, and it is in one day that the top-stone is to be brought on, and the whole building completed amid shoutings of angelic satisfaction and joy.

Chapter iv.

THE COMPLETE TEMPLE.

"And the angel that talked with me came again, and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep" (ver. 1).

HERE is the mystery of repetition. Even angels cannot deliver the whole message of God at once, or if they could do so, it is not in the power of man to receive the divine revelation in one gift. Moreover, we see different aspects of the same revelation. This mystery of aspect is often overlooked in estimating the orthodoxy of men. Zechariah did not see all the visions at once. Suppose that some other man came after him and saw the first vision whilst Zechariah was looking at the third, Zechariah was not at liberty to upbraid that man with indifference or ignorance or heterodoxy. All men must pass through their own visions; each man sees his own aspect of God, and realises his own theory of life and responsibility and destiny, and if so be the man be incorruptibly sincere God will see to it that his education is completed in his own way.

"And said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof" (ver. 2).

The candlestick is the seven-branched candlestick of the tabernacle; yet what variations are introduced for the purpose of showing that while God may retain the central or substantial truth, he reserves to himself the liberty and the right constantly to vary all the outbranchings and all the outshining of the candlesticks. It has been noted that the first variation here is the bowl on the top of the candlestick, containing the oil; then we have the pipes to conduct the oil into each lamp; then we have the two olive trees on either side of the bowl. All this multiplication of conduits shows that the action of the Lord in

the Church is not an action once for all, but is continually proceeding, and continually varying. The candlestick itself was never changed, but many mechanical accidents pertaining to its construction and use were continually being re-arranged. So it is with the truth of God and its whole ministry. Is the progress of the world, then, to be determined by the continually-changing ingenuities of man? The answer is, that these changes were not made by human ingenuity, but were the result of divine appointment. Besides this, there is the sublime answer in the sixth verse, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." God will have everything his own way. God never vacates his own throne. Yet God uses the candlestick as well as the sun, the oil of human manufacture as well as the spark of uncreated glory. We are to look for the Spirit of God, when we have done the work of God. The Spirit could not be withheld from us, except God were to be unfaithful to his own government, when we have honourably and lovingly rendered obedience to his will. If you have prepared your work, God will do his part; if you have not prepared your work, you have no right to expect the Spirit of God to complete what has been left undone through indolence.

"Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it" (ver. 7).

The powers that oppose God exalt themselves very highly, and boast loudly of their magnitude and importance. All this was foreseen by prophecy, and foredoomed. "Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased." Appearances were wholly contrary to the probability of Jesus Christ making universal progress through the world; these appearances did not escape prophetic attention; hence we read, "Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain." Prophecy does not overlook valley and mountain, crooked lines and rough places; all these are broadly recognised, and even specifically detailed, yet concerning the whole of them is the word of the Lord sure. Nothing shall stand before the great power of the risen Lord when he comes forth to complete the purpose of the Cross. The

foundation of the temple had been laid long. It was by no means certain whether the people would be able to complete the temple, but Zechariah foretells that the temple should certainly be completed; the headstone thereof was to be brought on "with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it"—all favour from God unto it, redoubled favours, grace upon grace. But the completion of the temple was only the completion, not the end. We only complete one temple that we may begin another. We only make the metropolis what it ought to be, that from it we may proceed to Christianise the whole land.

In verse 10 a question is asked which often occurs in human speech, "For who hath despised the day of small things?" Without prying into the exact meaning of this inquiry in relation to apocalyptic vision, it is yet our duty to remember it as a practical guide of conduct. The mustard seed is small, but what of the mustard tree! The dawn may be feeble, but what of the midday glory! The whole action of God has been an action from the small to the great, from the visible to the invisible, and up again to the invisible and eternal. A child can play with the acorn, but what man can shake the oak! God is continually surpassing all that he has yet done. "Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? And how do ye see it now? Is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing? . . . The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts." God always perfects his own strength in human weakness. Again and again men remind themselves that Joseph was raised from prison; David was brought forth from the sheepfold; Daniel was delivered from bondage, and the world itself is under the evangelising influence of fishermen and tent-makers, who themselves were called to their work by One who became the Carpenter. Wise is the old proverb, "Wouldst thou be great? Become little." A commentator has quoted the words of St. Theresa: "Whenever I am to receive some singular grace I first annihilate myself, sink into my own nothingness, so as to seem to myself to be nothing, be capable of nothing."

PRAYER.

LET thy mercy be multiplied unto us, O God, according to our need. We may have all the light we want; thou givest liberally unto all earnest seekers, who make the Cross their altar, and thou dost not upbraid them. Thou art our Father, and thy name is thy character. Thou wilt not withhold any good thing from them that walk uprightly; but is not the condition severe? Who can be upright before God? Who can be righteous when tried by the standard of the sanctuary? Yet we know thy meaning well, for we can testify that thou sendest thy rain upon the just and upon the unjust; thou makest thy sun to shine also upon the evil and upon the good; thou art kind to them that are evil and unthankful. The whole world is a reservoir into which thou dost pour what it can hold of the ocean of thy love. We bless thee that we are sure of thy goodness, thy readiness to help; this is our light, our joy, our song, our strength. Because God is near we have no dread; because the Lord is at hand we can pray loudly or whisperingly, with a look or with a touch, and not one hint of all our meaning will be lost on the divine attention. Thou hast been with us, round about us, above us, on our right hand and on our left, our down-sitting has been of consequence to thee, and thou hast watched our uprising as though it affected thy throne. The very hairs of our head are all numbered; our tears are put in God's bottle, and there is not a word on our tongue, there is not a thought in our heart, but the Lord, the Father, the Eternal One, knoweth it altogether. This is a joy ineffable, this is a terror unspeakable; for if we do right how glorious to know that thou art looking on, but if we do wrong how overwhelming to feel that the eye of judgment is searching our innermost thought! Meet us as sinners, and pardon us. The blood of Jesus Christ thy Son cleanseth from all sin. May we know its healing and cleansing power. God be merciful to us sinners. Amen.

Chapters vii., viii.

FASTING AND FEASTING.

IT is not enough to fast. That may be a trick; there may be a way of doing it which robs it of all its virtue and of all its significance. God takes our ceremonies to pieces, and says aloud, What is the meaning of all this—your church-going and hymn-singing, and apparently decent observance of religious ordinances? Is it in reality unto me, or is it unto yourselves? Fasting is not

postponed feasting. Yet this is what it has been turned into many times. Fasting has become a process by which we have got ready for eating. We have kept, as it were, on one side all the things we have abstained from, and then, when the fasting day was over, we transferred the whole of them to the table, and gorged ourselves with the very things we had fasted from. That is not fasting. When you fast from your bread, you must give your bread away—"Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry?" Fasting is not to lock the cupboard where the bread is, and to say, We shall not want you to-day, but to-morrow about this time we shall be prepared for the feast. No, the loaf must be given away, and there must not be left one crust in the house. When we feast the poor, we truly fast ourselves. God will not have any other fasting. As for church-going, what is the meaning of it? Is it to relieve the tedium of a dull night? Is it to hear something that will titillate the senses or momentarily please the fancy? Is it to avoid something at home? Or does it express the spirit of adoration, the necessity of the soul's immortality? Is it a coming to God because he is God? Is it worship, or a form of entertainment? The Lord thus searches into our ceremonies and says, What do they mean? So also with our feasting: the criticism of God is not partial: the judgment of heaven attends our banqueting, and asks questions whilst the foaming goblet is in our hands.

"And when ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did not ye eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves?" (vii. 6).

But, O thou loving God, thou art also our Creator, and are we not so made that we cannot get away from ourselves? The Lord answers, Yes, you are so made; but you forget there is a second creation, a miracle called incarnation, and following upon that a sacrament called Pentecost, the Whittide of the Spirit's descent, so that a man shall be himself, yet no longer himself, yea, another self; God will give him another heart. If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is not his old self one whit, but a new creature, with new aspirations, new necessities, new desires, with the restlessness which leads to contentment, with the ambition that despises the constellations because they are too small for its religious capacity. You are right when you say you cannot get away

from yourselves; your prayers are selfish unless you take great heed to them; but if you be rooted in Christ, living branches in the living Vine, why then you shall perform this miracle of being yourself and yet not yourself; of the earth, yet of the heaven; standing upon the earth, yet having a celestial citizenship and franchise.

Is the Lord contented either with fasting or feasting? No. Fasting and feasting are parts of a process. They are nothing in themselves. Do not think you are going to heaven because you are total abstainers; do not imagine you are going to heaven because you are winebibbers and gluttons; do not suppose that any ordinance has in itself as such any virtue; it is but typical, symbolical, indicative, a finger pointing to the Lamb, the Life, the Divine. If you look at the index-finger, and do not follow the direction which it indicates, the looking at the finger will do nothing for you. What will God have? He never changes; his exactions or requirements are always the same, and are always moral. He does not want clever men, brilliant men, startling men; he wants something that every man, woman, and child can produce: he is the God of humanity, and not the God of human eccentricity. Hence we have universal terms, lines that touch the horizon; they are moral appeals and judgments. Thus:—

“Execute true judgment, and show mercy and compassions every man to his brother: and oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart” (vii. 9, 10).

That does not require any learned exposition. These are the claims that establish the inspiration of the Bible and the authority of Christ's kingdom in the world. The Bible will have nobody oppressed. Wherever the Bible sees any one who is helpless, it sends the whole Church down to him; though the Church be engaged in ringing bells and observing sacraments, and doing all manner of official or mechanical work, the Bible voice says, Halt! There is a man outside who needs you: men first, and your ceremonies afterwards. Why do not men yield to the spirit of the Bible? When they discuss the Bible, why do they not attack its central citadel? Why do they go about striking

little lights, and trying to set fire to its outposts? Here is a book that wants justice, mercy, honesty, purity, peace, brotherhood. That Bible you cannot overturn. Clever men can do wonderful things with the chronology of the Bible and the external relations of biblical history; but the worst man that ever lived, though he be clever with the cleverness of a thousand unbelievers, can say nothing against this, "What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" That is the Bible; that is the inspired Bible; that is eternal franchise of redeemed man. Oh, if the critics, the word-splitters, and the word-mongers would confine themselves to what the Bible wants really and vitally to be at, namely, the redemption, the regeneration, the sanctification and glorification of the image of God in man, infidelity would be suffocated; infidelity could not live in that air, it would die and be forgotten. Ministers and churches are not set up to find food for infidels; it is not their function to say, Now here is a difficulty, and there is an impossibility, and yonder is something we cannot explain. Let these things alone; you have a book that says, "Execute true judgment, and show mercy and compassions every man to his brother." Will you tear that book to pieces, will you turn your back upon that document? Love it, repeat it, teach it to your children, bind it on your frontlets, write it on the doorposts of your house, and thus help the incoming of the reign of the Son of man.

The Bible establishes a great brotherhood. It does not found itself on municipal lines, which have such an amazing fascination for certain state mechanicians. Only get something founded upon municipal lines, and the world will enter upon halcyon days. Nothing of the kind. Get society established on household lines, on family lines, on home lines, and society will be secured in all that is of value, in permanence, dignity, and utility. God will have a house, it is called the Father's house; he will have a family, it is called the whole family in heaven, and on earth. Where is the dividing line? ay, where? We may have made one, we are fond of delimitations of frontiers and the marking of boundaries, but see to it that we do not begin to delimit the frontier between time and eternity. What if time and eternity

belong to one another, and swing together in heavenly music and harmony? God will have the house, the family, the home, the brotherhood; and he will have this because Jesus is the Son of man. O think of man with this outcome—the Son of man! There is a creed that wants us to worship Humanity, with a capital H, but that humanity is too filmy, impalpable, vague; it is not the humanity that is present, but the humanity that is past, and the humanity that is to come, that is to be worshipped; but the humanity that is past is by so much dead, and the humanity that is to come is not born, so that when we want to concentrate our worship upon this humanity, with an infinite H, the heart says, Beyond is what we want! Name that anonymous figure flitting before the mind's eye in outline—what is that? And we say, That is the Son of man, concrete, personal, individual, Christly. The heart says, Let him enter; it is enough, he fills up the spaces of the soul, as the tide fills all the caves and inner places, and levels with liquid reconciliation all the ruggedness of the crag, and rock; let him come, we belong to him, and he belongs to us. When he comes, will he have any other law than this? None. Sometimes in mood of mind as if in intense and desperate haste he totalises the whole command of God, and says, It is but two-fold: thou shalt love the Lord, and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself—the Old Testament rewritten, without supplement, with a new ink, red as the blood of the heart of the Son of God.

This law having been laid down, and insisted upon by moral appeal, what came of it?

“They refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear” (vii. 11).

They acted like restive horses or restive oxen. “Pulled away the shoulder” because the yoke chafed it. Men do thus, and then blame Providence for the results. Men never say, We have disobeyed God, and therefore these things have come upon us. Man will have his own way, and would still enjoy the peace, favour, and blessing of God; and God in heaven will not have that arrangement. Man wants to be law-maker and law-breaker; man wants to do just what he pleases to do, and expects everything to be according to his mind and taste at last. The earth will not help

him. He says, You must grow something yourself for me this year ; I am not going to sow your furrows with seed. Come now, whilst I slumber you grow me some corn ! And the earth says, No ; obedience before harvest, toil before wealth ; thou shalt work for thy bread, and work honestly, and then it shall be bread unleavened with a sense of indolence or injustice. Know then that you cannot be both God and man ; understand that at the very start of life you must be under law. You can pull away the shoulder, you can put your fingers into your ears and not hear the law, but the law is still there. A man can close his eyes and say, Behold, at midday it is midnight. Who is to be believed, the fool who has shut his eyes or the sun that lights the firmament with the blessing of his glory ? When men begin to say that they are guilty and that God is innocent, they have brought about this ruin, and God would have brought about peace and righteousness ; when common sense rules our thinking we shall get into law and order, and afterwards into harmony and peace. We must be rigorous, we must be severe with ourselves ; we must say whenever there is something wrong in the way of life, We did this : now when did we do it ? how did we do it ? Shall I blame somebody else, or shall I blame myself ? Always be severe with your own soul. We have no title to be severe with other men until we have made our own standing sure before God.

It is interesting to observe how society was constituted before the building of the temple :—

“Thus saith the Lord of hosts ; Let your hands be strong, ye that hear in these days these words by the mouth of the prophets, which were in the day that the foundation of the house of the Lord of hosts was laid, that the temple might be built. For before these days there was no hire for man, nor any hire for beast ; neither was there any peace to him that went out or came in because of the affliction : for I set all men every one against his neighbour ” (viii. 9, 10).

That was how society went before the temple was built. A neglected temple always means a ruined society. These words are not to be applied locally or parochially ; they express an eternal and unchangeable principle. A neglected God is a frowning heaven ; a frowning heaven is a desolated earth. We must

more and more insist upon the importance of the religious spirit in its relation to policy and commerce and agriculture, and the whole mechanism and build and meaning of society. Unless we cultivate our own spirituality to a high degree we may soon be tempted to forego this argument, or allow ourselves to be victimised into the belief that it is not an argument, but a sentiment. The first thing which the Christian man has to do is to keep up his spirituality to the very highest point. By keeping up spirituality I mean the cultivation of that insight which sees more than surface, more than so-called phenomena; that penetrating insight that sees behind all these things a Spirit, a Providence, ruling, moulding, and directing all things. We walk by faith, not by sight: Lord, increase our faith! We see nothing as it really is; the reality is beyond the appearance. Why be satisfied with the door? Smite it that it may fly open, and let the opening door be an invitation to enter and partake of the hospitality of God.

Always in Biblical history when men turned away from God, God turned away from them: "Therefore it has come to pass: Therefore I scattered them with a whirlwind among all nations: he that honoureth me I will honour, he that despiseth me I will lightly esteem." This is not arbitrary, this is not the changeable rule of a changeable court; this is simply the utterance of an eternal necessity. The sun says, He that will not have me shall have darkness and death. Is the sun cruel? Nay, the sun is clement and pitiful by announcing that fact; the sun offers its dower of light and warmth and comfort. So when we speak in Gospel words about the wicked being driven away in his wickedness, and about man neglecting to build the temple, and therefore having no harvest to reap, we are not delivering the arbitrary decrees of some fancy-created Jove; we are announcing the law of the universe, whoever made it.

What comes after the building of the temple? This:—

"For the seed shall be prosperous; the vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew" (viii. 12).

Certainly; the heavens and the earth are one: if one member suffer all the members suffer with it. When the earth is wrong

there is a thrill of pain all through the system to which it belongs. It is a little earth, but touch the body at any point, and instantly you communicate with the brain; and so when even this little earth sinned its first sin and damned itself in the sight of God, there went up through all the system to which it belongs a shock of agony; yea, it touched the Lord, it brought him to our aid. Let me tell business men that they cannot have any real success unless they are profoundly religious. Appearances are often to the contrary. Appearances amount to nothing. We cannot take in the case within the limits of three years or thirty years; we must look upon the whole field-space and upon the whole time-space, and this is written at the root of all things: A man cannot neglect God and be really rich. He may have heaps of money, but he has not wealth; he is not the owner of the wealth, the wealth is his owner; he is not proprietor, he is slave. He has locked himself up in his own gold-chest, and there he famishes as if he were a beggar. His soul is fat who makes the lives of others pleasant; he is strong who shares his strength with the weak.

These are solid doctrines to rest upon—God calling for judgment; God approving the moral, the righteous, and the true; God connecting his heaven with his earth, and God's heaven shrouding itself in frowns when God's earth rushes into sin and selfishness. This is the economy in which we live. We can pull out the shoulder, chafe against the bars of the cage, but the cage is there, and we cannot escape. Much better surrender, obey; seek the appointed way to peace, which is the way of the Cross, the way of Calvary, the way of that wonder which is called by this name—none nobler—the Atonement. Do not define it, but receive it in its largeness of reconciliation and hospitality and love. Oh, fall down before it, and say, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief."

MALACHI

(B.C. 420-397).

[NOTE.—“Malachi (‘my messenger’) is the last of the Old Testament prophets, as Nehemiah is the last of the historians; and the time of his ministry nearly coincides with Nehemiah’s administration. The second temple was now built, and the service of the altar, with its offerings and sacrifices, was established; for it is a profane and insincere spirit in that service, especially among the priests, which he labours to correct. He complains also that divorcés and intermarriages with idolaters have greatly multiplied—the very evils which Nehemiah so earnestly condemns (Mal. ii. 11. Comp. Neh. xiii. 23-27; Mal. ii. 8, iii. 8, 10; Neh. xiii. 10, 11, 29). He lived between the years 436 and 397 B.C.”—ANGUS’S *Bible Handbook*.]

Chapter i. 1-6.

THE BURDEN OF MALACHI.

WHO was Malachi? Other prophets give the name of their father, and give some kind of local reference; but Malachi comes upon us absolutely without introduction, and so destitute of nominal claim that we are not sure that “Malachi” was his name at all. Who were his parents? Nobody knows. When was he born? No one can tell. When did he write? Nobody can find out. Yet here is the writing. The word “Malachi” means, The messenger of the Lord. He was a kind of John the Baptist. He was sure that something was coming upon the earth. He did not know what it was; it was something glorious, something such as had never been seen before by eye of man. It is interesting to watch the struggles of the prophets; they want to say what they can never express. There is a spirit within them which testifies that upon the earth there is coming great darkness, great agony, and afterward great joy such as no summer ever brought upon the glowing horizon. Sometimes a broken column is more pathetic than a completed pillar: it means so much. Sometimes the rhetorician is mightiest

when his word quite breaks off, and he himself is stunned by an uncalculated amazement. What the prophets must have felt on this wise! They were always going to say what was in their hearts, but at the last the expressive word failed them. It will always be so in Christian service; we should always be going to do our best, and never be able to satisfy ourselves that nothing further can be done.

There have been ingenious men who have contended that all the prophets were not simple men as we are, but angels, for the time being at least, or incarnations, and that their names are significant of such embodiment and representativeness. "Hosea" = saviour. Why should any man bear that name as an hereditary right or casual custom, as who shall say, This boy shall be called Hosea? Names may thus be fantastically scattered abroad now, but the time was when names were offices, functions, characters, and indicators of destiny. Who knows but that the saviour-angel may have been incarnated in Hosea, and that his name may have been a writing from within rather than a cognomen chosen haphazard by some member of the family? "Joel": was there ever such a name on earth as "Joel"? Meaning no less than, The Lord God: sacredness had no higher sublimity in the imagination of the Jews. Was the boy called "Joel" as he might have been called by any common name in the history of our country? or was there an unconscious inspiration in the very designation of the child? There may be a danger of being fanciful in such interpretations, but there is an infinitely more awful danger of being blasphemous in our painstaking in the matter of excluding God from all our family life and all the details of our personal history. Beware of those people who are always telling you that this is fanciful, and that is unusual, and the other is eccentric; they will torture you with their monotony and propriety and folly. There should in our interpretation of life be a feeling that there is more in life than we have yet discovered. We should be quite willing to believe that when deaf and dumb Zacharias takes the slate, and writes a name upon it, he is but an amanuensis of God. Why not attribute much more to heaven than at present we ascribe to the throne of God? Why give God the oaks and the cedars, and keep back from him the grassblades

and the little flowers that find in them green sanctuary? These prophets may have been angels; they may have been the word of the Lord incarnate. There are other critics who are bold enough to operate critically in this direction. The word of the Lord *came to*—not a syllable, not a writing, but the Logos, the Essential Speech, the all-creating Word—the fiat came to them, and dwelt in them, and they all heralded and forecast the final and consummate incarnation. There are those of course who say “The word of the Lord” means a verbal message, something to say; on the other hand, there are critics who contend that “The word of the Lord” is personality, not speech; and that such personality embodies itself in human life and human character, and avails itself of human ministry to get at the outlying wondering world.

Whether this be so or not, here is the writing, the speech that was made to Malachi in the name of the Lord. And that speech is called a “burden.” The word of the Lord is always a load upon the soul. There be some who have no Lord in the heart, no Lord that needs carrying elsewhere than on the glib lips. The true prophet has always been a solemn man; he has always been bowed down, his attitude has been an unconscious attestation of his office. He did not know what he meant by that prone look when he seemed always to be looking at the place of graves rather than at the cradles of the stars. But the “burden” was pressing him, the weight gave him to feel his own weakness and littleness, and in his breathing there was a constant sigh, as the breathing of one who saw the world’s life as the world itself never saw it. Thus the prophets were distinguished from all other men. The prophets are now seeking perhaps to be too much like other teachers. They have lost their native tongue; they are babbling in a foreign language which they imperfectly understand: when they get back to God’s own speech to the heart, and tell the world what God has told them, tone for tone, word for word, the world will say, A new poet hath arisen; the old mantle has been recovered, and is now on the shoulders of a man worthy to bear it. Do not vulgarise your ministry; do not comedise God’s gospel. “Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar”; give men to feel that the word has about it an edging and fringing, delicate, yet urgent as fire.

"The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel"—What! to Israel? We have been accustomed to read so much "against Israel." Can there be so much meaning in a change of prepositions? Can the one preposition be a naked sword all edge, and the other a sign of reconciliation, approach, and tenderness? It is even so. We should be careful how we lay too much stress upon little words, especially merely auxiliary words; yet sometimes it is the little word that carries all the meaning. An "if" may keep a man out of heaven. This word is a word of approach it is God coming to Israel. The prophet has not to announce a great wind rising in the north, and coming down stormily upon the canvas tents of those who seek to shield themselves under such rags against the lightning of God; on the other hand, it is the Father coming towards, and coming more than half-way, and coming with sweet words and musical gospels to end the controversy, and establish the kingdom of peace.

This is proved by the words which immediately follow—"I have loved you, saith the Lord." But is not the grammar itself suggestive? Is not this something dead and gone? is not this a perfect tense, more than perfect or pluperfect? Is it not history, hoary, all but forgotten, an old, old love? So it is in English; it was not so as Malachi wrote it, his words are equal to, I have loved you, and do love. Had the words been, "I do love," that would have been weak, because the love might have been born but yesternight; had the words been, "I have loved you," that would have been pensive, sorrowful, and heart-breaking, because it is like reminding the soul of a song dead and lost: but seeing that it is "I have loved you, and do love," strength cannot be mightier, for all the past is there and all the urgent present, time and eternity are hand in hand. This is always so in God's relation to his people. His love is eternal, and it is immediate; it is from everlasting, and yet it always seems to be new-born. Where is there any old dew? Show us some dew a year old. It is the dew of the morning, and yet that same dew has been hanging about the altar of God's love ever since God lived. His lovingkindness is from everlasting, thy compassions are new every morning. This is the union of age and immediacy which we must realise in our personal

experience. God's love comes in as our dearest friend, and yet it always comes in as a perfect surprise.

"Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us?" Here is ingratitude. Here, however, is our own experience. This is the law of the family. You have been supporting some one a long time, and because you do not attend to the very last appeal, all you did in the years that are gone is simply forgotten, and the inquiry is, Wherein have you been so kind? Treacherous is the memory when it has charge of recollections of good and favour and help rendered under circumstances which ought to have made the offering of such assistance an imperishable remembrance. Have we not had familiarity and experience in this matter? All you have done for your friends, let me assure you, is forgotten. They never speak well of you, except it may be in some general sense. Favours are soon forgotten. Yet whoso forgets a favour is no true man; he is a bad man, whatever his doctrinal professions may be. We should keep all our friends' kindnesses as so many evergreens, every kind action kept in the heart like a precious plant and not allowed to die. But God's favours are forgotten principally because they are so numerous. The very circumstance that ought to have made their memory indelible is a circumstance which causes the record to be soon obliterated. We become familiar with God's blessings, and we seem to have established some right in their succession. We expect the sun to rise; we complain to one another if there be anything like disappointment attending the circumstances of his rising; we say, Do you call this April? Why, in April we ought not to have such fog and darkness: where is the sun? What right have you to the sun? Why not rather say, God be praised, here is the sun: God might have kept back the light from a world that has forfeited every claim upon his complacency, yet here is the shining sun. Keep your gratitude green. Never let your thankfulness fall into decay. You might thus by keeping a perfect remembrance of favours received multiply those favours tenfold; the assistance that was rendered to you in childhood should be with you as a stimulating memory to old age.

Then the Lord undertakes to answer these people, and says,

"I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau." We always wonder that this should be so, whereas in reality nothing of the kind occurred in our sense of the terms. You must understand the genius of a language before you can understand its particular terms or idioms or ways of putting things. In the olden time, in order to show that you loved somebody, you had so to say to prove that you hated somebody else; things were only learnt by contrast. God never hated any beast of the field. He would dethrone himself if he held in contempt the meanest worm upon the face of the earth. Do not apply your crooked and perverse etymology to God's words when he is struggling to say that he loves you. To love less was then thought to mean that on the other hand the love was infinitely great. "He that hateth not his father cannot be my disciple." No man can explain that etymologically; no dictionary holds all the meaning of that word; yet every soul that has entered into the passion of that love knows it. Is the father then hated? Nay, he is loved with tenfold greater love; but as compared with the sacrificial passion which the soul feels when it is kindled with the love of God, all other love falls as if in the rank and category of hatred, if not contempt. Believe not those who seek to teach that God has any partiality for one man above another. Is there no partiality then in God? Certainly there is partiality in God. Wherein is that partiality shown? In the matter of character. The Lord hates wickedness, disobedience, rebellion, every form of impiety, and sometimes the wickedness is personalised, as if God entertained personal animosity. God's partiality is on behalf of goodness, truth, uprightness: "What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" Then goodness is elected, predestinated, from eternity to heaven; and from eternity hell is reserved for wickedness.

In this case, however, there is a second and conclusive argument, illustrative of this same point in reference to character. Edom himself speaks, and therefore states the case in his own person. "Edom saith, We are impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places." There you have Edom, which is the other name for Esau. What will he do? He will defy God. He says in effect, God has thrown down the wall, but we will go

back and put up stone by stone, and we will complete it. The Lord hath sent a blight upon the terraces of the mountains where grew the fruits of Edom, and Edom says, We will go and rebuild those terraces, and turn the rains of heaven and the sunlight of the morning to our own uses, and we will have flowers and trees and fruits. Will the Lord commit this infamy without protest or punishment? Nay, verily:—"Thus saith the Lord of hosts, They shall build, but I will throw down." There you will have the explanation of character. Edom or Esau is rebellious; the Lord will not countenance the rebellion. Edom defies God, and God asserts his own right; Edom says he will build, and God says, Then so be it: build, and in the morning there shall not be left one stone upon another. He who fights God fights himself, and loses himself.

A great doctrine is laid down in verse 6:—"A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master." That is the great doctrine. God founds an argument upon it; he says, Take it in either light: "If then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear?" There are two theories of God: the one is called the Fatherhood of God, and the other is called the Rulership of God. To some minds God is all Father, to other minds God is all Ruler or Sovereign: according as one or the other view is taken we have one or the other system of theology. The Lord says he will take either, and by either he will be judged and he will judge others. Thus, "a son honoureth his father," that is, he instinctively honoureth his father; whatever his father may be or may not be, there is something in the son which says, You should recognise that man with peculiar honour, and render to him filial homage, because, be he what he may to other people, to you he is father. The Lord says, So be it, I will take your own natural doctrine of parenthood: now if I be a father, where is your filial honour? On the other hand, other persons say the world is governed by sovereignty; here we are under a gubernatorial economy, we are under the hand of a despot; there is a voice which affirms destiny and doom. The Lord says, Very well, if that be your theory of the universe where is my fear? I will take either theory you please to propound, and I will ask you a question upon each. Now, if I am

your father, where is my honour? If I am your tyrant, where is my fear? The Lord meets us on our own ground. We cannot escape God by inventing a new theory. Whatever our theory may be God says, Be it so: now where are we? If our theory be that this world made itself, the Lord says, If it made itself, how did it do it? Explain the process; or explain the still more difficult process that you, an intelligent man, can believe such utter unintelligibleness. If we say, This world is enough for us, the Lord says, Then what are you making of it? Let me examine your books, let me read your record, let me keep company with you for a whole year, that I may see what you are making of the only chance you will ever have in the universe. If we say the whole world is under the government of a good providence, then the Lord will say, Then where is your faith? Why this anxiety, why these wrinkles on the forehead, why these hot tears in the eye? Why that shaking in the chair as if you were in the presence of some deadly fear? Where is rest, where is confidence, where the sweet assurance that, come weal, come woe, God will appear for my deliverance, and set my feet in a large and inviolable place? If we say, Christ died for us and rose again, and we are Christ's, the Lord at once says, What are you giving to Christ or keeping from him? How do you fulfil your vow? Do you stand up to the square demand of your own oath? How then might the Lord charge us with fickleness, inconsistency, and a duality of life which means, with the head we acknowledge that Christ observes, but there is a devil tugging at our left hand, so that we serve him, the enemy, in some degree,—and to tell the truth we like it. This is the tragedy of life. If a man shall arise at the last, and tell the Lord that he knew that he was an austere man, and therefore he had carefully kept the talent and rendered it back just as he got it, the Lord will say, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest . . . thou oughtest therefore. God pins us down with our own excuses. He takes them from us, and thrusts them through our head and nails us to the earth with the very metal which we supplied. Sinners are suicides. It is not God that kills them, they kill themselves.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, we rejoice that thou art light. Of light, thou art the fountain and the centre. God said, Let there be light; and there was light,—himself shone upon the brooding darkness. Shine in our hearts; be the morning of our lives; be the summer of our souls. Jesus Christ thy Son is the Light of the world. As long as he is in the world he is the Light of the world; he abideth with us for ever, therefore are we living in the day of light and in the presence of light: may we answer light by light, and thus may thy creation be full of glory. They that are of the darkness love the things that are evil; may we be children of the morning and not of the night, rejoicing in all things pure, beautiful, true, and lovely. If thou wilt answer this prayer for us at the Cross, we shall know that the blood of Jesus Christ thy Son cleanseth from all sin; we shall know that we have God in us as the light abounds in our whole thought and purpose. Chase away the last shadow; break up the evil empire of night; and bring in the sovereignty of divine effulgence. We bless thee for a religion that is full of light; we thank thee that we are called to fellowship one with another in the full light of day. Thy Church always meets at midday; it is the child of the noon; there is in it no love of darkness, no trace of mystery or secrecy that is corrupt: the Lord help us to realise our call into light, and may we be found in loving obedience serving the altar of the Cross. Amen.

Chapter ii.

PROPHETS AND PRIESTS.

“And now, O ye priests, this commandment is for you” (ver. 1).

THE prophet goes to the fountain-head. The people had only gone wrong because the priests had gone astray. When the leaders are wrong, what can the followers do? In the majority of cases the leaders are wrong, and they would go further wrong, but for the outcry and protestation and moral anguish of the people. But the priest's office was never an easy one. It is a hard thing to have to read and preach and pray by the clock. No man can tell how perilous is the position of a minister, priest, or teacher; he is never far from the bottomless pit. It cannot be an easy thing to speak every day of the Cross

of Christ, and yet to keep the emotion of the heart at its finest point. It is an awful thing to pray, to preach, to speak sacred words; it is almost living on the edge of hell to conduct an octave of religious services; to be right—not in words, that is easy, for the words are all written, and may be read with a hireling's tongue; but to keep the spirit in high tone, to say "Calvary," and lose nothing of its pathetic dignity; to point to the Cross, and see it in all its hot blood—to do this day after day, and keep off familiarity, say, is there any greater miracle in human experience? It is an awful exercise to sing, and yet to know nothing about the hymn we have sung; to miss all its meaning, to rattle off its tones with a careless or little-interested tongue; to sing it as if it were so many unrelated letters, instead of having in it the red blood, the arterial blood of the Son of God. It is easy to blame the priest of any day, but he has a weary work to do; he must be more than mortal if he can always do it and always feel it. We know his refuge, but sometimes a man is so tired that he cannot run even for shelter; we know where he ought to go and what he ought to do, but sometimes the wolf is upon him before he can straighten himself after long and conscious prostration. Pity the leaders, pity the singers, pity the preachers: consider them well.

Yet there is nothing unreasonable in the accusations of the Bible. Never does a reproach come alone like a naked razor; the reproach is always associated with reasoning, and out of the reasoning it derives all its keenness. The Lord states the case, argues it, point by point, and then at the end presses home the divine accusation. It is beautiful to see that nowhere in all the Bible is a single railing accusation brought against God himself; never does God lower the moral standard. There is no accommodation in divine righteousness. We never read that to-day we may intermit a little; the law shall no longer be so rigorous and ruthless, the law shall be oiled down into smoothness so that it shall be easy, and the spirit of disobedience shall be less exasperated: never. The law never changes. The moral tone of the Bible is never lowered in accommodation to human weakness or human selfishness. Nor is judgment lessened that a man may feel the more comfortable with himself.

There is wondrous originality in the way of putting the divine judgment before the consideration of men. Probably that judgment was never more vividly and powerfully depicted than in this instance: "I will curse your blessings": what to you is a blessing shall cease to be such, and shall become a curse: I will make your health the worst disease you ever had; I will make you poor through your very wealth; I will send upon the richest results of your labour such a darkness that you will flee away from the very image of your own success. How terrible is God! But always how terrible in righteousness. Why does this punishment fall upon the priestly race or house? Simply because the priest has been unfaithful, self-considering, base in heart, forgetful of his duty to God and his service to man. The Lord does not make priests for nothing; whatever the priest may be, if he fail in his function God plagues him by blighting his blessings. The priest may be a poet, gifted with fine fancy, able to sing to the world's comforting and inspiration, and if he palter with his gift, if he prostitute it, God's judgment will fall heavily upon him. We do not limit the word "priest" to religious functions or exercises or responsibilities; every man has his own call of God, and by so much may be regarded as sustaining a priestly relation to the throne of God. A man may be a merchant, a counsellor, a man of great sagacity, a person qualified to exercise large and useful influence, and if he fail to work out his mission in life this punishment falls upon him; he has more anxiety over his wealth than he ever had over his poverty, and his very health is a plague and a temptation to him all the day. How God tightens his hands upon the reins! How he tugs! how he rules! We think sometimes he has given us full head, and we go at our own pace, and suddenly the jaw is torn, and we begin to feel that we are servants, not masters; that we are under providential guidance, not under selfish inspiration. The Lord reigneth, and he is as loving in judgment as he is in redemption.

How will the Lord curse the blessings of the priests? "Behold, I will corrupt your seed." Now, the house of Aaron had nothing to do with ploughing and with sowing; why then corrupt or spoil or mar the seed that was to be sown in the fields?

Why take the juice out of it? Why deplete its vitality? The house of Levi is by law exempted from agricultural pursuits. True; but not from agricultural tithes. The priests lived upon the land, as certainly as the farmers did, and the Lord punished the priests where they would most feel it. After they had gone in that direction they should feel the weight of the rule of God where they could most sensitively respond to the imposition. It is easy to sow seed; but are we quite sure that no operation has been performed upon the seed before we have sown it? God is invisible; the hand of God is intangible; the ministry of God is impalpable. The seed looks the same as in the healthiest years and the most abundant harvesting. The farmer says, The seed is good: sow it! If we had been gifted with the piercing eyesight that sees the spiritual we should have known that only yesternight the Spirit of God was in the granary, spoiling every seed garnered against seedtime. Why will we be befooled always by the eyes of our bodies? As if they could see anything. We do not live the faith-life that believes that all things are under the touch as they are under the ownership of God. God makes the wine vinegar; God makes us drink our own etymology. If we call for wine, sharp wine, we shall have enough of it; and God will make the wine sharp and sour to the palate. Why not believe that all things are under the government and benediction of God? Behold the fowls of the air; consider the lilies of the field; see God everywhere.

What a beautiful picture of a priest is given in this very chapter:—

“The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity. For the priest’s lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts” (vers. 6, 7).

What a criticism upon moral influence do we find in these words, namely, “and did turn many away from iniquity.” There is no histrionic pomp about the act; but who can tell what moral beauty there is in it? Prophets and priests and preachers and leaders work in different ways. Some have what may be

called, from a public point of view, a negative or obscure function ; but their record in heaven is that they turned many away from iniquity, by private expostulation, by unknown prayer—that is, fellowship together with the sinner—in communion that is never published. By influence, by example, by tender words, many are turned away from iniquity, from selfishness, from drunkenness, from baseness, from evil pursuits of every kind ; not by the thunder of eloquence, not by the lightning of logic or high reasoning, not by the mystery of metaphysics, but by calm, quiet, loving, tutorial interest in private life,—who knows what triumphs have been wrought within the sanctuary of the house ? God is not unrighteous to forget our work of faith and labour of love ; God knows how many lambs we have tended ; how many straying sheep we have brought back to the fold ; how many hopeless hearts we have re-inspired ; to how many we have given of the oil of grace. Let no man, therefore, fail of heart and courage because he does not speak from a public pedestal. His name may not be known far away from his own fireside ; there are private priests, there are household evangelists, there are ordained missionaries whose names are not published ; there are women-shepherds who are seeking the very worst sheep—the sheep that the shepherds would not look after, the shepherdesses are following still ; all the service is written down, and attached to it is the commendation of God.

The Lord now urges against the priesthood the heaviest charge of all : “Ye have caused many to stumble at the law.” There is the most malign influence which man can exert on man. No longer is the mere priest condemned, no longer is the laugh expended on the priest himself ; the people have got beyond that ; they say, If this is the priest, what must the law be ? If the law were good, surely it would save the priest from such debasement as he embodies ; if the priest can be so bad, so selfish, so worldly, so devil-loving, what must the law be ? So we go from the personal to the moral, from the concrete individual instance to the written and eternal law ; we begin by mocking the messenger, we end by trampling under foot the message. This has been woefully true in the history of Christianity. Christians have ruined Christianity more than ever the infidél or the unbeliever

could do. If Christians speak ambiguously ; if Christians resort to sharp practice ; if Christians tell lies ; if Christians break all the commandments, how can the law stand ? What goes down when a man is proved to be bad who ought to have been good ? The Cross is shaken ; every wound of the Sufferer is made larger by that rough handling of his Cross. If Christians had been faithful there would have been no infidels to-day ; if the men who pray had believed in prayer there could have been no argument as to the validity and utility of prayer. The priests so lived that men spat on the altar at which they ministered ; Christians have so lived as to point a jeer or suggest an oath. The Lord is naturally more careful about the law than he is about the priest. The priest will die, but the law abides. We do more than prove ourselves to be hypocrites, we excite suspicion about the very inspiration which we profess.

Then comes, in verse 9, a terrible "Therefore." Always stand in reverence before the "Therefore" of divine reasoning : such a *Therefore* is an iron gate that falls back upon hell. When God says this "Therefore" he gathers the offenders in his hands and places them in the bottomless pit :—"Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base." He added to the contempt already incurred. The priests had made themselves contemptible ; the Lord added scorn to the contempt of the people, he added the sting which penetrates the life. Do not imagine that the law is bad because the priest is unworthy ; do not speak against the Cross because the preacher is a liar ; do not wound the Lord because the servant has gone astray. No man falls because he is a Christian, but because he is not living up to the Christianity which he professes. Do not make excuses out of the bad characters of other men, saying, What can I do in the presence of such debasement as this ? That is vicious doctrine, and it would not for a moment be entertained or applied in the common relationship and affairs of life.

I had a sum to invest, let me suppose, and I went to a well-known gambler, and said, What should I do with this, pray ? And he said, Entrust it to me : I have experience, you have none ; I will handle it for you, and you shall know the result.

I went to ascertain the result, and the man had fled away. You will naturally inquire why I consulted such a man. I wanted to know the exact value of a picture, to continue my parable, and I submitted it to the criticism of a man; he laid his fingers upon it, and said, I do not think much of your picture. Said I, Why lay your fingers upon it? Because, said he, that is the only medium through which I can form any opinion of your picture. Said I, Can you not look at the picture? No, said he, that I cannot do: I am blind. You will naturally ask me why I consulted such a man as to the value of a picture. I wanted to know how the climate of a far-away country would suit my dying child, so I called upon a man, and asked him. Said he, Do not trust it: it is a bad climate; it is a place that I cannot recommend. Were you ever there, sir? said I. No, said he, I have never been out of my native village. You will naturally wonder that I should have consulted such a man. Now you have consulted infidels about Christianity; you have consulted men who never prayed as to the efficacy of prayer, you have gone in the wrong direction for advice. You smiled behind my back when you thought I had consulted a blind man about a picture: what shall I do with you when I hear that the only books you have read about Christ are the books that tried to tear him in pieces? You have consulted his enemies; you have never consulted his friends. The argument applies to the bad priest, to the ill-behaved professor of Christianity. Blessed be God, our duty is clear. I will not go to the bad priest for a report of his function, I will not go to the bruised and self-damned professor of Christianity in whose character hypocrisy is conspicuous above every other feature, and say, Who is Christ? and what can Christ do for men? This I will do: I will go straight up to the Lord himself, and if he fail, then I shall know what to do.

Chapter iii.

THE DIVINE CALL.

HOW wonderfully coloured is the Bible! What a mystery of light and shade, mercy and judgment, goodness and severity! We have found this all the way through the record, and now we find it on the last page of the revelation. God is the same God, and he changes not. All the change has been in form, in outward relation, in merely trivial circumstance; there has been no change in God; the standard of righteousness has never been lowered; hell has always been hot and bottomless. Make of the testimony what we will, there it is; many men wrote the Book—many men who never saw one another, and who never read what the other had written, and yet when all the parts of the Book are brought together they are one. The unity of the Bible is one of the strongest arguments in exposition and defence of its inspiration. If all the men had written in the same room, in the same day, under the same pronounced inspiration, we might have had the same mechanical unity; but the circumstances are wholly different. The men wrote without knowing that others were writing; some of them wrote at various times themselves, perhaps hardly remembering what they had written; they wrote amid the rush and storm of ever-changing political circumstance: yet when all the parts are gathered together, was ever such a literary temple seen on all the field of time?

Yet down to the last God is in controversy with certain people. He has not so wrought out the Bible that at last on the final page of the Old Testament everybody is in heaven. There is the clash of arms on the last page; men are still discontented, impious, selfish, rebellious to the uttermost—yea, men who ought to have known better. The men with whom God is now in controversy are men who have had opportunities of knowing

him, seeing him, reading his law, and watching his way in life and time, and yet at the very last their "words" are "stout against" God. What a school God keeps! What stubborn scholars, what dense minds, what rebellious hearts! Yet the school is not closed. How patient is God! how merciful even in anger! How restrained is he to whom even the lightnings say, Here we are; use us, and we will put an end to rebellion. Still the school goes on, still the scholars are reading and writing, and praying and thinking; now and again God visits the school and sheds tears over it, but still he will not close its doors, or withdraw his light from its windows.

The complaint of the people was from a certain point of view not unnatural. How was the complaint grounded? It was grounded upon visible and obvious facts, such as, the prosperity of the wicked, the happiness of the proud, the abundance of the prayerless. These circumstances were aggravated by the fact that in many cases those who prayed most had least, those who made virtue a study were stung through and through with keenest disappointments. Yet this is God's world. It is somebody's world, because here it is. It is not a world of dream or speculation or intellectual invention, but a real world, visible, ponderable, tragical; scarred with graves, mad with grief. Yet to charge such a world upon God brings with it a difficulty of no ordinary kind. That difficulty, indeed, would be fatal were the history of the world limited to any statable number of years, though the years might run into centuries. The time of judgment is not yet. We could stop the builder and say, pointing to his unfinished house, his unroofed edifice, Is this a home for men? Can you mock human expectation by such rudeness of outline? The builder says, Give me time, and you shall see a house, and you shall see burning in it a hospitable fire, and the walls shall be adorned with pictures, and every echo in the place shall answer musically to childish laughter and glee—give me time. If we give the builder time, shall we hasten God impiously? Our urgency may be blasphemy. Who will stop the artist and say, Do you call that the delineation of the human face? The artist says, No, I do not, but give me time. I have much to do there yet; all I want is patience on your part and patience

on my own, and then when I say I have done my utmost you may pronounce your judgment, but so long as I am working, hold your tongue. That would not be unreasonable. Is it, then, reasonable to point to God's world and say, Look at the graves, the agony, the misery, the disappointment, the whole tragedy! O dost thou call thyself Father and Sovereign? The answer is, Yes; I am the Sovereign and the Father of the universe, and all creation shall be musical and beautiful; give me time.

At that period of history we read :—

"Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name" (ver. 16).

So even at that period society was not given up wholly to impiety. Whilst some men were speaking against God, some were speaking for him. The Lord knew who were gathered together in his name. Even Christian critics are often too much given to noting the noise and the tumult, the riot and the success of wickedness, to catch the whisper of prayer on the part of others. Once a good man said he was left alone; he was the only man that prayed. Surely the Lord might have smiled upon such innocent ignorance as he said, No, poor rejected prophet—"Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him." It is an infirmity on the part of Christians that they do not recognise the real, active, solid good that is in the world. Yet that infirmity is in some degree excusable. Christians do not want to see any darkness or iniquity or wrong-doing, and so long as they see aught of that kind they cannot open their eyes to the beauty that lies close at hand. Blessed be God, he is the registrar himself; he keeps the books, he marks the statistics; God takes the census.

A beautiful picture is this, containing men that "feared the Lord." Mark the reverence of their attitude, the benignity of their countenance; listen to the tender music of their voices: men that are speaking to one another, with one another, for one another; they may all be speaking together without disorder; in that holy tumult there is distinctness of articulation. Nor

is that enough: not only have we God-fearing men, and men speaking to one another, but we have such men "often" speaking to one another. Not once a week, not a Sabbath interview, not an occasional fellowship, but an "often" brotherhood. Men should seek opportunities for talking and praying together. We should have a thousand prayer-meetings in the week if we would only enter into the real genius of religious communion. When two men meet together why should they not hold each other's hand, and in a moment pray; look one another in the face, and take a solemn pledge? Why this mechanical arrangement of praying at a certain hour on a certain evening? That may have its uses, but there ought to be an "often" meeting, roadside interviews, words few in number, but pregnant in meaning, uttered sometimes hastily, sometimes more by sign than by articulate speech; and thus the fraternal relationship should be kept up, and be turned into an instrument of religious inspiration, comfort, and progress. We may be cautioned against formality, and the caution is not without its uses; let us take care lest in denouncing formality we lose the whole fellowship.

No man can estimate the practical uses of religious intercourse. Take it that some men, say seven in number, pray in the city every day, they keep the city alive; yet the heads of the city, not being of the number, smile at the thought; but which is larger, the thing seen, or the thing not seen? Which is really mightier, the hammer that an arm can swing, or the gravitation that even mathematical genius cannot calculate or express in number and figure? Which is the more important, the man's body that must die, or the man's soul, the immortal unquenchable fire that makes him a man? We ourselves are driven along certain directions to confess that the spiritual is greater and mightier and more valuable in every sense than the material; we have only to carry our own admission to its highest consequences to ascertain and establish as a practical factor in life the holy doctrine that religious inspiration is the salvation of society. Is the air empty? Why, there is more vacancy than aught else in the universe if such be the fact. What does God want with all this unmeasured vacancy? We are told even by cold science that there is life in the air: we know by experience that with-

out air this life could not live. What is air? What is its magnitude, its colour, its composition other than chemical? If the air itself is vital and vitalising, who shall say that the air is not a sanctuary, a temple of spirits? Who knows who goes forth on the wings of the wind? They must not speak who are always angry with religious dogmatism; they have by anticipation shut their own mouths on that subject. They will have no dogmatism; then let them be consistent with themselves, and refrain from being dogmatic. Let it be a question at all events that may tempt the fancy, and inflame with holy excitement the imagination. Who knows what presences are in the temple of the air? There are many things more unthinkable, to use a cant and grotesque expression, than things distinctively religious. If you have any kind of eternity you have something just as unknowable and unthinkable as God. We are all in the same condemnation, if it be a condemnation to be associated with that which is infinitely greater than ourselves. Where did this so-called matter come from? Has it always been here? "Always" is as indefinable a term as "God." Who knows the meaning of the term "always"? It is a debased form of the word "eternity." It is either always, or it is not always: if it is not always, when did it begin? If it is always, who can stretch his mind over dateless duration? We prefer, therefore, seeing that we must at some point be associated with so-called unthinkableness, to associate ourselves with the idea of living sovereignty, tender fatherhood, merciful, gracious, and mighty providence. Accepting that theory, we often talk one to another about it; each man writes his own prophecy or psalm or history, and when a hundred of these are all brought together they make a beautiful Bible, one in thought, one in music, one in love. We should compare notes frequently; men should not be ashamed of talking about their soul's progress. Because certain men can degrade religious intercourse into fanaticism and hypocrisy, that is no reason why other men should not elevate it into a daily means of grace.

"A book of remembrance was written before him." All books are not made of paper. God has a book, and "another" book, which is the Book of Life. What we call book is a sign or hint of that larger writing inscribed by the finger of

God, or immediately under his inspiration. There is a book of names. Men are often asked to inscribe their names in books that there may be some remembrance of them in the family when they are no longer present. The idea is pathetic: why not lift up the thought to its best religious applications, and think of God writing our name? He seems to take a delight in names; saith he, I have known thee by name, I have called thee by name. "Rejoice not that the spirits are subject unto you," said Christ: take no pleasure in mere miracles and wonders and signs, "but rejoice rather that your names are written in heaven."

Then comes the holy consequence:—

"And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him" (ver. 17).

"That day." What does the Bible mean by this constant reference to another or special kind of day? Always in the Bible there has been a coming day, and always there has been a promised prophet; everywhere there has been the sound of One who was coming. This is the largeness of the Book, its sensitiveness to the whole action of evolution. Poor soul, to have thy name written everywhere but in God's Book! Is that fame? Reject it, resent it, avoid it! When the day does come, it "shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch." Here, on the one side, you have what mistaken people said, namely, "It is vain to serve God: the proud are happy, yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered." That is our complaint against Providence. On the other hand, we have (iv. 1):—

"For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch."

He comes slowly, but he comes surely. The proud man has a short day to work in. The candle of the wicked shall be blown out: the memory of the wicked shall rot. "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay

tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found." Who will fight against God? "Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace." Here is providence brought before us focally. We see somewhat of it in its intense unity: man's complaint, God's judgment; man not understanding the mystery of human education, and God explaining it. God will not heat this fire so long as he can help it; mercy prevails against judgment. An opportunity is given for the very last offender to lay down his arms and return to his Lord: but if there be aught left of wickedness it shall be burned in the oven. When God has consumed a man, who can find him?

We might exegetically end here, but evangelically we cannot. There is a call to men to return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon them; to confess their sins, and he will forgive them; to meet God at the Cross, that eternal reconciliation may be effected there. Blind are they who do not see God in providence; lost are they who take the world as meaning nothing but dust. Jesus Christ came to give us a new view, to set us in a right relation to God and to himself and to the coming eternity. He found himself thirsting, and he said, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." He shall have trial, tribulation, difficulty; but all these are part of a process, the Lord will lead through all this disintegration and temporary ruin into reconstruction and ineffable blessedness.

This is the Christian doctrine which we have espoused. We love it. It covers the whole space and the whole necessity of life. There be some curiously-headed men who want to be God themselves. We cannot explain them; that they can be explained we will not doubt; but they are men fruitful in the suggestion of difficulty, skilful in the barren process of cross-examination; they are difficult to satisfy, because they want with a blind eye to see God's glory, and it cannot be done. Be modest, be calm, be trustful. Try the Christian Cross, the Christian truth, in daily life; see how it goes with a man in all the action of life's tragedy; listen how it talks; observe how it soothes; note how it inspires; behold how it makes man a new creature.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we bless thee for boys and girls ; they are thy children ; of such is the kingdom of heaven. Thou wilt not rest until Jerusalem is filled with boys and girls ; this is in thy counsels, this is written in thy Book, this thou wilt surely do, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. There are no orphans ; thou art our Father in heaven ; thou dost never change, thy love never cools, thine eye is never withdrawn from any of us : thou dost guide us by thine eye. If we could trust in thee more we should have no fear ; if we could live in God we should live for ever : they are immortal who are in God. Now and again we feel the cold wind, and we say, The hill we travel is very high, and the darkness comes down upon us suddenly ; but if we had faith in the living Father of our Lord Jesus Christ the wind would be a summer air, the hills would be a slope up towards heaven, and the darkness would be the background of the stars. Lord, increase our faith. Look upon us in all the relations of life ; look upon us in the house, and make the house a home, and the home a church, because the living Christ is there ; look in upon the wedding feast, and grace it with thy presence, thou Son of man, Maker of the only wine that can make glad the heart of man ; be present in the death-chamber, and Death shall see thee and flee away, for thou art the Resurrection and the Life ; be with all thy servants in business, and help them to understand that there is no business worth doing compared with the business of the Father's house ; be with us in all straits, difficulties, afflictions, and burden-bearings, and at last, through the Cross, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, bring us fully home. Bless all the lands, far-away countries in the east and in the west, in the north and in the south ; may the whole earth rejoice in the impartial glory of the Sun of Righteousness. Amen.

Chapter iv.

CLOSING PROPHECIES.

THIS is a prophecy ; a prophecy of a day, a burning day ; a prophecy of a coming Sun, called " the Sun of righteousness " ; a prophecy of victory over the wicked ; a prophecy of a prophet. Men cannot help prophesying. Prophecy is true ; the thing prophesied may be false. For want of distinguishing between these two things, so simple that a child might comprehend them, the whole Christian Church is thrown into confusion, and a hostile world is fighting ignorant and futile battles. If we

can establish this distinction we ought to bring about a totally new conception of the kingdom of God upon the earth. We must approach this subject in its highest aspect by beginning where we can amid the most infantile illustrations of the principle.

Walking is right ; but you may be walking in the wrong direction. What is the good therefore of finding fault with walking ? Why not confine your remonstrance or expostulation to the mere matter of destiny ? You cannot alter the fact that man was made to walk. Speaking is right ; speaking is of God : but you may be speaking the wrong thing, you may be speaking profanely, you may be speaking falsely. But why should there be any battle about speaking ? Why not confine your attention to its misuse or abuse ? It is easy to pass from these initial illustrations to higher ground. On that higher ground the argument is just as vivid and just as strong. Thinking is right, thinking is inevitable ; but the thought may be all wrong. And yet men have confounded the thought and the thinking, as if they were one and the same thing, and hence we have battles of words, and great noises of contradiction, simply because we do not confine attention to the point that is right and the point that is wrong. You would not forbid speaking ; you would rather cultivate the act and the art of utterance. When you deal with speaking you deal with something you have nothing to do with ; what you have to do with is the use to which you put your speaking power : the one is God's gift, the other is men's use of that gift. On the latter fight as many battles as you please, but do not imagine that you can alter the infinite law of the divine decree and purpose in the creation of man. You cannot hinder speaking, you have no power in that direction ; your power begins with the things that are spoken. Watch that point, be most critical and careful there ; but for the sake of high reason do not interfere with the ordinance of heaven, which has made man a speaking creature.

Thus we come nearer to the purely and distinctively religious ground. We come, for example, first of all to faith. Faith cannot be destroyed by anything that man can say. Faith is one thing ; creed is another. Faith is to creed as is walking to the point

walked towards, or speaking in relation to the thing that is spoken. You may fight the creed, but you cannot touch faith; it does not come within the sphere of words: there is nothing you can lay hold of. You may as well fight life itself; faith is life's life. Your instruments, how long and keen soever, cannot get at that ghostly, divinely-human power. Men must believe. The world would fall to pieces without faith. At the same time, you may be believing the wrong thing; you may be putting your faith into false incarnations. There battle as much as you please—you are called to fight; insist upon holy, ineffable, divine faith embodying itself in the purest expression. Here it is that men can never destroy religion. The forms change, blessed be God, but the essential principle abides. Life always takes upon itself new expressions and new embodiments; but the life itself is everlasting, unchangeable, the very gift of God, and the very crown of humanity. Yet men suppose that when a creed is being attacked faith is being assaulted. Such men can never be taught to see the distinction between faith—the inward element, the spiritual principle, the highest characteristic of man—and the creed into which that faith is translated for the time being. The creed is not of equal value with the faith. Why do we not therefore confine our attention to essentials?

What applies to faith applies to prayer. You cannot help praying. It is altogether useless to ask whether prayer is ever answered; whether it is answered or not, you cannot give over; because you cannot give over, the presumption is that prayer is answered. Here we come upon a law, a decree, an ordinance, a holy church in the wilderness of life; here is something that we must do perforce. The prayer uttered may be all wrong, it may be unwise, it may be positively ignorant, it may indeed encroach upon the province of real wickedness, it may be selfish, thoughtless, narrow, shallow; that has nothing to do with the question; prayer is not the thing prayed for; it is a spirit, holding converse with faith and thought, and is not to be brought into the court of human criticism. When we say in broad terms that you cannot give over praying, the answer is not to be found in individual instances in which men have avowedly renounced all that belongs to prayer. First of all, they have not renounced it,

they cannot renounce it; men may kill the body, but after that they have no more that they can do: the soul cries and prays in hell. You can kill the body, you can thrust your bodkin into the throat, and stop the prayer in the shape of words, but the soul will pray across the ever-separating gulf. How puerile is the talk therefore about prayer as to whether it is answered; the question is, Is some form of it answered, is some practical expression of it regarded benignantly and complacently in heaven? That is not the prayer; the prayer is behind that, independent of that; living, breathing, and crying out to the Infinite without words. If you take words from criticism, criticism has nothing to do; it is a grammarian, a philologist, a mere word-monger; if you do not speak to it you baffle it, you drive it to its wits' ends. The question therefore does not arise in the first instance, What do you think, what do you believe, what do you pray? The earlier question relates to the fact of belief and thought and prayer, and the whole mystery of our being, which is not to be rendered in speech. Where are all the battles fought? Outside; no assault can be made upon faith; therefore rest, O thou disquieted soul. If all the creeds in Christendom were burned to-morrow, faith would abide, for no fire can kindle upon that sublime and inexpressible force. By faith the world is saved: we are saved by faith. Faith is the gift of God; without faith it is impossible to please him. Yet so little, so mean, is man, that when he gets hold of a written creed he thinks he has got hold of Christian faith.

He thinks, moreover, that when he has made critical havoc of the written creed he has shaken the foundations of the Church. Where are those foundations? They are in God. When you have convicted your little child of a mistake in syntax, have you overturned the faculty, the power, and the right of speech? When you have detected your little boy going down the wrong road, do you say, This comes of walking; here is a palpable instance of the unphilosophicalness and the unreasonableness of walking? Yet when we find men proposing certain dogmas which we do not like, and writing other creeds with which we are not content, we say, Here is an evident and indisputable proof of the simple vanity and inutility of what is

called religion. So foolish are men and ignorant! They are before God as creatures destitute of reason. We may have been supporting the wrong Church all our days; but the Church cannot be destroyed; the foundation of the Lord standeth sure; we can never get rid of the true Church. Amid all our misunderstandings and conflicts, our oppositions and exasperation, the Church abides, because the Church is divine and invisible as God. When men realise that thought, there will come over their spirit a great quietness, a holy enjoyable calm; when that thought rules, the Sabbath day dawns on human souls. Yet men think that when they have assailed the Church of Rome or the Church of England in any of its communions and departments, they have really brought a tremendous fusillade against the very bastions of heaven. Why, if all our Roman, and Greek, and Anglican, and Nonconformist Churches, as mere structures, were swept off the face of the earth to-morrow, the Church of God abides in all its integrity, in all its music and usefulness. Why do you confound the coat with the man? Why do you confound the body with the soul? Why do you confound the lame and infirm speech with the soul that wants to tell you something and cannot, because the vessel of your speech cannot hold the wine of its conception?

So we come to this matter of prophecy. All the prophets were right—all prophets are right; yet prophecies may be wrong in innumerable instances. But we have agreed that walking to the wrong place is no argument against walking; saying the wrong thing is no argument against speaking, and therefore we ought to agree that because a prediction is false within the narrow scope of its literalness therefore the spirit of prophecy is not destroyed, or may not be touched in its divine integrity. Our contention is that every word spoken by the biblical prophets was right. They were right not only in their election and inspiration, but they were right in the things which they uttered. They were moral prophecies, they were judgments of God. The word of the Lord thus abideth for ever. Men of false mind may have twisted and perverted and discoloured it, and may have utterly misapplied it, and may have lived feloniously upon it; yet that does not touch the Word itself. The life is greater than

its incarnations. Men have abused their lives, but they cannot touch their life. Life is a larger term than lives, as faith is a larger term than creed. We know the true prophecy when we hear it. When this weird prophet comes amongst us and says, "For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly shall be stubble," we say, That man is right. We know it; the ages could not do without precisely such a voice. We must not turn music away when it approaches us and seeks our hospitality. The earth waits for this burning day; the stubble is increasing, the wicked are growing prouder day by day; whilst we look upon the confusions and difficulties we hear a voice saying, "Behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven," and we say, Hail, thou expected morning! Come, and with infinite conflagration burn all evil.

We cannot understand how utterly, how ineffably sublime these predictions are until we get into a certain spiritual mood, until we feel the wickedness of wickedness, and see all evil in some degree as God sees it. Blessed be God for fire; it is disinfecting, it is illuminating, it is destructive. God has a great fire, and he is going to bring it that it may burn up all the lies of hypocrisy, all the insincerity and selfishness of the world, cleansing it,—heaven's great fire: a glorious prophecy! The soul says on hearing that this day is coming, Amen! Come quickly! Yet we must not dictate to God as to the pace of his movements. He does not measure by our chronometers any part of his economy or advance. A thousand years are with the Lord as one day, one day is as a thousand years,—a phrase by which he shows us that he takes no note of time after our scale and pattern. He is always coming quickly; he always comes suddenly: so does all life; so does all death; so does all joy. The Lord cannot come other than suddenly to his temple. When he brings life it is in a moment. No matter how long the preparation for death, when it comes it comes suddenly. We say, It was very sudden at the last. Ay, that is God's way. And when our joy comes it always comes with the last drop. The vessel is almost brimful, now it is quite brimful, now the last drop falls, and the cup overflows, and we say at the last, it came with such a surprise, it came so

suddenly, we could hardly believe the gladness. The advent of God cannot but be sudden. Do not therefore fear that God has forgotten the promise of this day. If we could see things as they really are from his point of view, we should know that the day had already come. All wickedness is being burned down. The wicked man has a terrible time of it to-day. Do not believe him when he laughs ; his life is a lie ; his last stroke of merriment is his last forgery. He cannot be happy—or God cannot ; I must leave it between them. Appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, never give up the faith that all wickedness is in hell, and never was out of it. All wickedness is hell. We do not know it at the moment ; there may be just one little speck of time in which wickedness presents another phase, but before you can measure the magnitude of that speck it has faded from the disc, and hell has set in, hell's winter of fire : a contradiction in terms, a paradox in words ; an awful reality in consciousness.

Thus we attempt to seize a proper conception of essentials. Thus we illustrate essentials by incidentals, such as talking, walking ; thus we come to see that prayer is a necessity, faith is a necessity, thought is a necessity, life is a necessity ; and all the hurlyburly of the world's hostility is directed against the outposts only. Bring in the prey you have taken from God, and let us count it, appraise it, hang it up, and label it. What have you taken from God ? Nothing. You have taken a great deal from ignorance and from conceit and from intellectual vanity ; you have made tremendous raids upon ground which man has bounded off for his own occupation and enjoyment ; there criticism has wrought miracles of destruction : but what remains ? God, thought, faith, prayer, love. Why, then, the enemy has taken nothing ? That is all he ever could take ; there is nothing else to lay his hands upon. And when the enemy comes in with tremendous force to take from us this creed and that standard and the other form of Church government, and makes great havoc of a critical kind, and we turn and say, " Lord Jesus, thy Church is having an awful experience," he says, with the eternal smile of love, " Fear not them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do." " Let not your heart be troubled ; ye believe in God, believe also in me." Lord, increase our faith !

Chapter iv.

CLOSING PROPHECIES (Continued).

HERE are two effects of fire. In the first instance here is the effect of destruction. When the burning day comes it shall leave the wicked "neither root nor branch." That may be called the negative action of fire. No man who is wicked can fight Omnipotence, and win. Why do the heathen rage? Why do the people imagine a vain thing? Why do men kick against the pricks? Why does the ox back upon the goad, and torment itself with keener agony? No man can fight Almightyness, and conquer. When the Lord's day of burning shall come, that great oven-day spoken of by the prophet, all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble. Who can fight fire with straw? Who will set up a wooden fence against a volcano? When all the burning is done how will the day's history total? Thus: "It shall leave them neither root nor branch"; nothing to be seen above ground, nothing to be found underground; the triumph of retribution is complete. It is well that men should thus be able to forecast their fate. The candle of the wicked shall be put out; the memory of the wicked shall rot. The ungodly are not like the righteous; they are like the chaff which the wind driveth away, as if in mocking and derisive sport. There need be no waiting for the judgment-day to know our destiny: this is the day of judgment. The Lord's right hand is evident, and the Lord's left hand is vividly displayed; and men can rank themselves. Conscience shall be judge, and personal history shall be found personal evidence. For the wicked there is nothing but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation. "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." These are terrible words; but the surgeon is a terrible man, who takes out his instrument that he may cut the diseased flesh or remove the diseased joint. But is he only terrible? On the contrary, his terribleness is an aspect of his

beneficence. If your house is standing upon a bog, it is better that you should know it in time. Do not declare that the messenger is terrible and severe. He is not; he is wise, he is considerate, he is merciful; he has come to state the facts, that you may know what to do. Why should you be the victim of your own diseased sentimentality, saying, Do not tell us about ruin and burning days, but tell us about sunshine and flowers? Rather say to all God's angels and ministers of grace, Men of God, tell us the truth! A call for the truth will elicit the truth.

But there is another action of light or fire, there is the action of healing :—

“But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings” (ver. 2).

A terrible Sun! Dead trees have a hard time of it when the sun shines; they do not understand one another; there is no point of co-operative contact. The tree that is dead is out of the solar system; it does not come into the current of its ministries: it stands in the soil, but is not rooted in the centre. All day the sun fights it, mocks it, blisters it, takes out of it drop by drop any lingering juice that may be in its veins, until the process of desiccation is complete. It is otherwise with the living tree. The sun kisses it into larger life; blesses it with reproductive and generous warmth; tells it messages from heaven; speaks to it of the larger trees on the other side of the river; tells the most blossoming and blooming and fruitful tree upon earth that it is only a dim emblem, a poor shadowy type, of God's real trees; and promises all living, true, and good things that they shall be lifted up into the ideals which now they imperfectly typify. Nor do the trees complain; they say, If we are only types, we can do God's work in that fashion; if we trees are to be carried on to a higher realisation, so be it, God's will be done. We are thankful for what we can do, now and the future we leave with him. What is this “Sun of righteousness”? Not a man; the grammar is against that view. In Hebrew the word for “Sun” is feminine :—Shall the Woman of righteousness, the She of beauty, arise with healing in her wings? The universe would be empty without the woman. Eden did not begin to grow until the woman came; and if she killed it, it was only because

she first made it alive. We do not understand these allusions to gender. Is God Father and Mother? Is there a feminine element in God? When he made man he made him man and woman, and he made him after his own likeness. Who knows the meaning of these things? No man. Yet they are full of meaning to the soul—meaning which will not give itself up to words, but will hover above the soul, flutter near it, throw fragrances upon it, sing to it, startle it in the night-time with visions of light. We must not part with these unseen presences and ministries. There is a cant that says we cannot go into the unseen world; we know nothing about the world unseen. It is the merest drivel to say so; it is also opposed to the simple facts of the case. We are all living in the unseen world; we are eternally living within ourselves when we suppose that we are only living within a sphere or circle that is visible. We are invisible to ourselves, we are invisible to one another; we only know one another by revelation. Behind the word lies the meaning; behind the meaning lies the motive; behind the motive lies eternity. And so there be fools that tell our young souls not to trouble about the unseen! Have you seen thought, spirit, life, motive? Have you seen the Self of yourselves? It is even so with these deeper spiritual interpretations. This woman-Sun is a fact.

Look at the effects of divine healing. They are stated by the prophet:—"Ye shall go forth." There shall be activity. This is the characteristic of divine religion; it will not let men stay at home, it develops the spirit of travel and locomotion. Where the divine religion has taken hold it says, When will the ship be sailing? When will the train be going? When will the coach be ready, that we may ride through the wilderness? Why not sit down here? We cannot. Why not? To "go forth" is the watchword of our faith. Missionaries cannot always give an account of themselves. We have already, in this PEOPLE'S BIBLE, come upon men who have said, "Let me go," and Pharaoh has said, Why, have I not been good to thee? Yes. Hast thou not had an abundance to eat? Yes. Hast thou not been as one of my own? Yes. Then why go? I do not know why, but I must go. That is the pressure of destiny. Pharaoh did not

understand how a well-fed beast could wish to leave his pastures and his stalls ; but the Lord, as we have seen, had spoken to the man, and filled him with the spirit of restlessness. Christianity is restless in that sense ; it will not give itself any recreation or cessation from labour until the very last man has been saved from the shipwreck. Not only shall ye go forth, but ye shall "grow up as calves of the stall,"—a figure which signifies, Ye shall be sportive, ye shall realise the idea of youthfulness ; you shall be vivacious, you shall not be old, cold, dead things, ye shall be as calves of the stall, full of life, leaping because of the very redundancy of vitality. There is a hint here of spiritual enthusiasm. This is not an animal vivacity, it is a spiritual impulse and ambition ; it is the new and deeper magnetism, it is the effect of being in touch with God. Where there is no enthusiasm there is no true realisation of the sunlight ; we have seen that it is the sun that keeps us in obedience. The sun tells us what to do. The sun will tell you whether it is holiday-time or not. You cannot go out willingly to take your holiday in the rain ; if for arbitrary reasons and appointments you are obliged to go, you go with discontent and complaining ; but when the sun comes and fills the whole firmament with his glory, we say at once, Let us go. The sun tells you what coat to wear, what food to eat ; the sun is master.

But there may be activity, that is to say, going forth, and there may be a sense of sportiveness and joy intimated by the words "grow up as calves of the stall." But what then ? After that there will be conquest :—

"And ye shall tread down the wicked ; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the Lord of hosts" (ver. 3).

Christianity goes forth to conquer. Christianity never fails ; any failures are temporary and apparent and superficial. If Christianity could fail, arithmetic could fail ; all truth could fail ; geometry could fail ; and we all know that geometry always wins within its own sphere. Geometry makes the builder take his plumb-line with him ; Geometry says, You must build according to me, or you cannot build at all ; your little edifice will topple over if you do not build according to the sun, the moon, and the

stars. All these essential things are settled for you. As for your so-called architecture, well, you can be Gothic, or Doric, or Grecian, or Italian, or Composite, or what you please ; Geometry does not interfere with your architecture : but you must build according to Euclid, the gospel according to Euclid, or you cannot build at all. In proportion as anything is true, it must eventually succeed. There will always be found fools who will venture some other policy : there have been men who have ventured to build crooked walls, and the walls have fallen down upon them.

Now the oracle is about to cease ; Malachi is about to resign the pen. What are his last words ? There shall no prophet arise after him until John the Baptist come, and John the Baptist shall not come for four hundred years. What is to be in the meantime ? Does God provide for the interstices of history ? Has God taken note of gap and vacancy and hiatus in the wondrous evolution of history ? Hear the word :—

“Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments” (ver. 4).

With that Bible you must be content for four centuries. Keep in mind the law. In the Jewish synagogue a great distinction is drawn between the law and the prophets ; in the Jewish synagogue there are two lessons in public worship, the one lesson is read from the law, and that lesson must be read by the highest functionary in the synagogue ; the second lesson is from the prophets, and any boy may read it, any mean man or casual student may read the prophets ; only the very highest officer of the synagogue may read the law. We do not believe in these distinctions ; we believe that the utterances of God are one, that whatever he speaks is truth, is music, is poetry, is life. We are, however, dealing with men who did make certain distinctions, and we must respect them. For four hundred years the people were to remember the law of Moses. When Jesus Christ was asked what a man should do to inherit eternal life, he said, “What is written in the law ?” That was a startling answer. He did not say, It hath been said of old time, but I say unto you, when it came to a matter of life and death. God has never left matters of life and death to be settled by arbitrary dogmas and statements, and by variable theories ; when it has come to a face-to-face interview

with God, when it has come to a question of life or death, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" we are referred to the very first chapters of the Bible. All great questions were answered in eternity; only little riddles, present problems may be discussed in variable terms. The lawyer answered, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God." Certainly, said Christ; that will never change: do that, and thou shalt live. So the Jewish Church was not left without witnesses through the four centuries of so-called silence. The law of Moses then prevailed. It would have given life if lovingly accepted and obeyed. All truth gives life; all truth brings light. But is it "the law of Moses"? That is only part of the description; the full description is, "the law of Moses my servant"—there is the supremacy of God; "which I commanded unto him"—there is the fountain of law. God commands, Moses interprets, Moses communicates; but all that man can do is to act instrumentally; the fountain and the origin of law we find in God.

Is there then no touch of prophecy, is there no widening of the horizon before the view of the Church? Is it simply the law, the law, the law,—iron, dogmatic, positive, unchangeable? Is there no sky above this poor earth of law? God never made earth without making sky. So in this instance we find the sky, the horizon, the far-away hint and promise:—"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet"—not Elijah the Tishbite. We cannot distinguish always between the local and the universal. If the Lord had promised Elijah the Tishbite, then we might have expected one certain, definite, limited, local personality; we should have fixed our attention upon the word Tishbite, and unless a man had come with that locality attached to his name, we should have refused the man, though his eyes burned like suns, and his voice was eloquent with thunder. We are great in technicalities, we are *nisi prius* men; we know all about precedents, and cases that have been in the court, and localities, and technicalities, and particularities: but we are nothing when it comes to great sky-action. The man who was to come was to be the prophet; the local, the parochial, the limited forgotten, and the prophetic, the inspired was to be predominant, illuminating the sky for the day of his sovereignty.

What shall this Elijah do when he comes? He shall work out a great reconciliation:—

“And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers” (ver. 6).

This is not a family reference; the prophet is not speaking, or God is not speaking through the prophet, merely of the father of a family and the children of a family; he is speaking of fathers in the sense of leaders, teachers of the world;—and children, the populations and the flocks of the earth: and this prophet when he comes will be known by his desire to promote and his power to promote reconciliations. God’s prophets always bring music, harmony, rest. If any man bring aught else, except in an initial and temporary sense, he is no prophet sent by God. “Lest I come and smite the earth with a curse”—with a ban: lest I so strike it that a great wale shall burn across its forehead. Would the Jew end the reading here? * No; the Jew could never read a chapter and end it with such a word as “curse.” He would go back to the preceding verse, and conclude with the words, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet.” The Jew always concluded his biblical reading with a sweet verse, a tender benediction. Thus the Lord allows us to make beautiful images and beautiful issues out of his Word.

To close the Old Testament is a solemn act. As commentator for the people upon the Old Testament, I now close the record. It is a wonderful story. We have gone through it from the first page to the last; yet we have not begun it. Herein is the inspiration of the Bible, that we end the book but not the revelation. Were we now to turn back to the opening of Genesis we should find the flowers waiting for us as if we had never gathered one, and all the trees of the Lord’s right-hand planting, blooming, blossoming, bearing fruit, and in those trees we should find choirs of singing birds uttering music from heaven. I pray you be familiar with your Bibles. If you will only read your Bibles no man can ever take them from you.

* See *post*, pp. 451-2.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou hast made our life strangely wonderful ; yet in it thou hast set pleasure above pain, light above darkness, thou hast made the summer longer than the winter. Thou givest joy where thou givest life ; all young things laugh and play and gambol and sport themselves in the growing morning. May it be so with our souls ; may no old age ever set in upon our hearts ; in our spirit, thought, purpose, love, may we be young for ever ; may we grow towards youth and not towards old age. We thank thee for this religion of cheerfulness, vivacity, music, and sense of triumph ; this is the gift of God, this is the flash of immortality. The Lord reveal his purpose towards us more and more, little by little, that we may see the way of life, and walk in it with obedience and delight ; not only with resignation and contentment, but with acquiescence and sense of being with God every moment. Thou knowest what our purposes are ; if they are good, healthy, sound, useful, thou wilt bring them into happy fruition ; if they are otherwise, crush them as the brood of the night, and may we never be able to find them again. May our lives be beautiful with truthfulness, and useful because we walk in the steps of him who went about doing good. May this be our one business, then we shall have no tediousness, no wearisomeness in life ; our life shall pass like a sacred song. Be round about our homes ; may there be flowers climbing up around the doorway, and around every window, honeysuckle and woodbine and roses, and flowers of all hues and fragrances ; and may we know that our house is the house of God, because of the love that is there and the fulness of summer light. If any man would trouble his home, trouble him in return ; vex his soul, send darkness upon his eyes, and drive away his malign purposes, and teach him that he who would spoil a home would wreck heaven itself if he could. Look upon our fatherless and motherless ones ; be with all who are in trouble of heart and dare not say so ; be with those who are dreading to-morrow morning's post because the letter may bring blackness and ruin ; be with all who are anxious to pray, and yet cannot or dare not open their lips in intercession ; soften hard hearts. Send a spirit of love into all our bosoms ; and do this because we gather at the Cross, the Cross of Christ,—because we assemble on lovely, mournful Calvary. O Saviour of the world, make us glad this day ! Amen.

Chapters i-iv.

A GALLERY OF PICTURES.

WE have some pictures in the prophecy that are very vivid, and some of them very humiliating. For example, we have a picture of the utterest selfishness in i. 10 :—

"Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought? neither do ye kindle fire on mine altar for nought."

Yet they sang how good a thing it was to be but a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord. Men do not come to this kind of selfishness all at once. For some degrees of wickedness we must patiently and skilfully graduate. We do not attain the highest quality of iniquity at a bound; we cannot, speaking generally, extemporise the supremest kind of devilishness. We begin carefully, we proceed slowly, we take pains with the details of our action, and not until we have become inured to certain practices and usages do we take the final step that lands us in the very refinement and subtlety of evil-doing. Nothing is so soon lost as spiritual apprehension, the power of taking hold upon the invisible, the eternal, the spiritual. There is so much against it. We unhappily have eyes that can only see what we describe as the material, and in our folly we describe it as the real. That is the very lowest kind of philosophy. There is a metaphysic that denies the existence of everything we see; I would rather belong to that school of negation than to the school which affirms that there is nothing but what we can see with the eyes of the body. We are always tempted away from the higher lines. Who would shut his eyes and talk to nothing, and call it prayer? Who would have so many of his own aspirations dropping back upon his heart like dead birds, and still believe in an answering, benignant, loving God? Who would refuse the great bribe? There it is, visibly, tangibly, immediately; you can lay your hand upon it, and secure it, and if there is any need by-and-by to pray yourselves back again from the felony, and still retain its produce, then see the man of God and take his ghostly counsel. The distinction of Christianity is its spirituality. Christianity lives amongst the spirits. "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and truth." When we make Christianity a mere argument or a mere philosophy, we lose its whole genius and meaning. Christianity comes to kill the visible by putting it into its right perspective, and investing it with its right value, which is nothing beyond a mere convenience. Christianity comes to lift up the soul to God, and to fix the heart upon things unseen and eternal. Christianity comes to make a man blind to everything but God,

and therefore to see everything aright because to see it in its relation to God. How far are we to blame for degrading Christianity from its proper level, and making it stand amongst so-called other religions to take its chance with the general mob? We can be attacked with some success, not to say with desperate savageness, if we fight the battle on wrong lines; but not when we stand upon Christ's lines, of direct living fellowship with God, doing everything for Christ's sake, glorifying God in our body, which is so-called matter, our soul, which plays a part in the psychical philosophies, and our spirit, the touch that makes us one with God. If we pray ourselves into higher prayers, ever-ascending until speech must be displaced by music, then we are upon a way where we shall find no lion, neither shall any ravenous beast go up thereon, it shall not be found there. And as for dying, we shall not die—"he was not, for God took him," shall be the rhythmic ending of a noble, beautiful, spiritual life. Losing this spiritual apprehension, what do we come to?—to men-service; we come to be men-pleasers, time-servers, investors, hirelings. When the true spirituality reigns in us we shall have no fear of man, we shall see the richest patron of all going out of the sanctuary, not because he is wounded in the back, but because he is wounded in the heart by the Spirit of God, on account of his unrighteousness, unfaithfulness, vanity, and worldliness; the Church will be the richer for his absence. Never let the spirituality of the Church go down, for then you open the door to every kind of invader; you make devastating encroachment possible; but laying hold of God, you shall be safe even from the insidious assaults and invasions of selfishness.

We have also a picture of the true priest:—

"The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity. For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts" (ii. 6, 7).

What was said of Levi should be said of every man in the varied ministry of the Church; he ought to be as beautiful as this. Yet not only beautiful, but massive, strong, pure, dominating; not asking permission to live and to preach, but granting permission

to millionaires to chink their gold. It is quite true that here we have an ideal picture. It satisfies the imagination to have a word like "ideal" in its vocabulary. But may we not so use the word "ideal" as to find in it a temptation to a continual lowering of the spiritual stature, and a continual cooling of the spiritual temperature? Certainly these words are ideal; this is God making another Adam, this time out of marble, breathing into him the breath of life, and making him majestic and noble: this is God's conception of the true priest. Yet we call it ideal, and then go away to our commonplace. The minister of Christ cannot rise to perfection. If any man were to assume himself to be perfect he would justly discredit himself by that very assumption. What is it that is required of the true priest, preacher, minister, or pastor? It is required of him first that he be found faithful to his light, to his immediate inspiration; he is not to live for to-morrow, he is to live for this present day, with all its clamour and all its importunate necessity. But should not a man study consistency? Yes—No. Is it possible for an answer to be both in the affirmative and in the negative? Certainly. Wherein is to be the consistency of the preacher? In his spiritual sincerity. There he must never fail. As to his words and views, do we not live in an atmosphere? Are we not environed? Do not ten thousand ministries continually play upon every line and fibre of our nature? There may be inconsistency in words, phrases, terms, and statements, and yet there may be consistency of the finest quality and fibre in the moral purpose, the spiritual intent, the unchangeable loyalty to the Cross of God the Son. A preacher's perfectness should be found in the continuance of his aspiration, and the continuance of all practical endeavour to overtake his own prayers. Do not mock a man because his life is not equal to his prayer; when a man has no higher prayer to offer than he can live he may pass on into some other world in the Father's universe. Meanwhile, no man can pray sincerely, profoundly, continually, and want to be like Christ without growing,—not always upwards; there is a growth in refinement, in susceptibility, in moral tenderness, in sympathy of the soul for others, as well as a growth in knowledge, and stature in intellectual majesty. It is well to have an ideal before us. One of two things must happen in the case of the priest.

" . . . Did turn many away from iniquity." That is a beautiful work for you, my preaching brother, to have done. You may never have been heard of beyond your own sphere, and yet within that sphere you may have been working miracles which have astounded the angels. You have kept or turned many away from iniquity. I have a brother who had great influence over one of his leading men, and that brother, though his name was never heard of beyond his own circle of ministerial exertion, laid himself out to save that man. That man's temptation was drink. The minister followed him, turned swiftly upon him at the public-house door, and said, No, not here! It was not much of a sermon to preach from a public point of view, but the poor tempted soul quailed under the interdict, and went home. Why, to have been the means of giving him one night's release from the devil was to have done a work worthy of the Cross! You cannot tell what your negative work amounts to—how many you have kept from going wrong, doing wrong, or speaking unwisely, untruly, or impurely; you do not know what your example has done. Be cheered, be encouraged; you do not always live in the miracle of Pentecost; sometimes you live in the quietness that can only do a negative work, but blessed be God, when he comes to judge our work there will be nothing negative about it. He who has turned away a man from iniquity shall be accounted as one who has turned a soul to righteousness; he is a great judge, and he gives great heavens to those who serve him.

There is another line of thought—

"Ye have caused many to stumble" (ii. 8).

How acute, how penetrating, how ruthless is the criticism of God! Here again we may not have been wanton in our irreligion, we may not have been irreligious at all in the ordinary sense of the term, but for lack of zeal, for lack of honesty, for lack of character, we may have caused the citizens of Gath to mock, and the daughters of Philistia to sneer at the Lord. "Caused many to stumble": how could they help it? They looked to the priests, pastors, guides, and teachers of the community for example, and they saw nothing but warning. They

said, The speech of these men will be pure, gentle, courteous, gracious; they will especially speak of one another in terms of appreciation and brotherly regard. Hark! Why, this is talk we might have heard at the tavern; this is criticism we might have heard at hell's gate; this is censoriousness that would shame an infidel. What if they have gone away to mock the God whose name his own professors had forgotten? "Caused many to stumble"—by little-mindedness, by narrowness of soul, by lack of sympathy, by idolatry instead of worship, by pointing at a church-roof and calling it God's own sky. Here we should daily pray that we give offence to no man needlessly; here we should do many things that the Gospel be not hindered; here we may work miracles in the name and power of the Cross.

Another picture is that of a terrible judgment:—

"And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the Lord of hosts" (iii. 5).

O God, send some man to testify against us, and we can contradict him; send the oldest and purest of thy prophets to charge us, and we can recriminate, and remind him of his human nature, and tell him to take care of himself lest he fall, rather than waste his criticism upon us who have fallen. Send Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel; send all the minstrels of Israel, let them mass themselves into a cloud of witnesses, and we can laugh them to scorn, and tell them not to mock our fallibility by an assumption of infallibility of their own; but thou wilt not do this, thou dost come thyself. Who can answer thunder? Who can reason with lightning? Who can avert the on-coming of eternity? "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." He will be not only a witness, but a "swift witness"; he will break upon us suddenly, he will come upon us from unexpected points; where we say, All is safe here, there shall the fire leap up, and there through a hedge, where we thought to make a resting-place, shall a serpent break through to bite us. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe." Yea, I call mine a man's hand, but to thee

it is the hand of a little child ; take hold of it, for the way is slippery, the crags are here and there very sharp, and the steep is infinite, and the enemy is already breathing upon my neck. O God, save me, or I perish ! In that modesty we have strength ; in that reliance upon God we have a pavilion that the thunder cannot shake, that the lightning cannot penetrate. I would hide me in the house of my Saviour's heart.

Then we have a picture of a perfect restoration :—

“And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground ; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts. And all nations shall call you blessed : for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the Lord of hosts” (iii. 11, 12).

One nation cannot be good without another nation feeling it. When England is noble the whole world is aware of the transformation ; when America has responded to the appeal of righteousness the whole globe feels as if a Sabbath were dawning upon the shores of time ; when any nation does a noble deed it is as if all the world had prayed. Let us remember the might, the immeasurable might, of spiritual influence. Convert England, and you convert the world ; convert London, and you convert England, speaking after the manner of men. Leave God to look after the results which you call material. Is there a devourer ? God will rebuke him for our sakes. Does the vine cast her fruit before her time ? Angels shall keep that fruit on the stem until it be purple with hospitality, yea, with the very love of God's heart ; and as for the fields, their hedges will become fruit trees, and all the fences shall bloom and blossom because the Lord's blessing has fallen upon the earth. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.” God will take care of the vine if we take care of the altar.

Then, lastly, we have a picture of a sun-lighted world :—

“But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings” (iv. 2).

Literally, with healing in her wings. The word “Sun” in Hebrew is feminine—“her wings.” God does not measure him-

self by our small grammar, saying, You call sun masculine when you ought to call sun feminine. It is masculine in one language, it is feminine in another. We must know what world we are in. Every man has his own dictionary; every speaker must be judged by his own mental and moral standard. What is the allusion here? Who can tell? Is this the mother of the universe? Is this the long-hidden woman who has been flooding creation with her love? Is this the unnamed Mary who has brought under her wings the Son of God? Take the meaning at any point, it is a meaning of light. We do not know what words mean; we must leave their meaning in many instances. We do not know what weight is, how then can we know what God is? Yet there be those who think they know all about weight. There, they say, we are at home; and there I defy them. What is weight? You cannot define it. Here is what you call a ton. It is a ton only on the earth. The astronomer can point you to an asteroid and say, Take your ton up there, and when you get to that height you can lift it with your little finger. Where is your ton now? Take that same ton to the surface of the sun, now lift it; it is seven-and-twenty tons now. Yet there be those who think that mysteries are in theology alone, and what a wonderful world it would be if we could only get rid of the Bible and all its ghosts. Nay, nay, thou prater of fool's words, all is mystery, all is wonderful. Lo, saith the materialist, God is here, and I knew it not. Blessed confession! the beginning of faith. Lo, this is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. So, verses of the Bible have different meanings in different places under different circumstances. Sometimes Psalm xxiii. is simply a lovely composition in words, and sometimes it is bread and wine from heaven's own vineyard and God in all his motherliness. There are experiences in which the soul sees paradoxes reconciled and made musical.

The last verse of the Old Testament is terrible; it reads:—"And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers"—that is good, but the last words—"lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." The Rabbi would never end with that; the Rabbi said, "No, I will go back and read the last verse but one." The Rabbi could not end

with a curse. There are several books in the Bible that end with doleful words: "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." The Rabbi could not defile the synagogue with making "evil" the climacteric word, so he read the verse before. Isaiah ends: "And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcases of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh." And the Rabbi said, We cannot end with that, we must end with the verse before. And the Lamentation,—“But thou hast utterly rejected us: thou art very wroth against us.” And the Rabbi said, Read the verse before that; we cannot end with storm and darkness, and tempests of imprecation. Oh let us close with some word of comfort! So must it ever be with the true messenger of God. He will have to deliver his tremendous message; but blessed be the Cross of Christ, every sermon may end with music and light and joy. There is no text in the Bible that lies half a mile from Calvary. I do not care what the text is, there is a road from it right into Golgotha. Malachi has for his last word curse; but we may have for our last word blessing, we may have for our closing word peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters.” “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” If we added to that we should be attempting to paint the lily and gild refined gold. There is but one word that can be added to it, and that is not our own: “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”

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